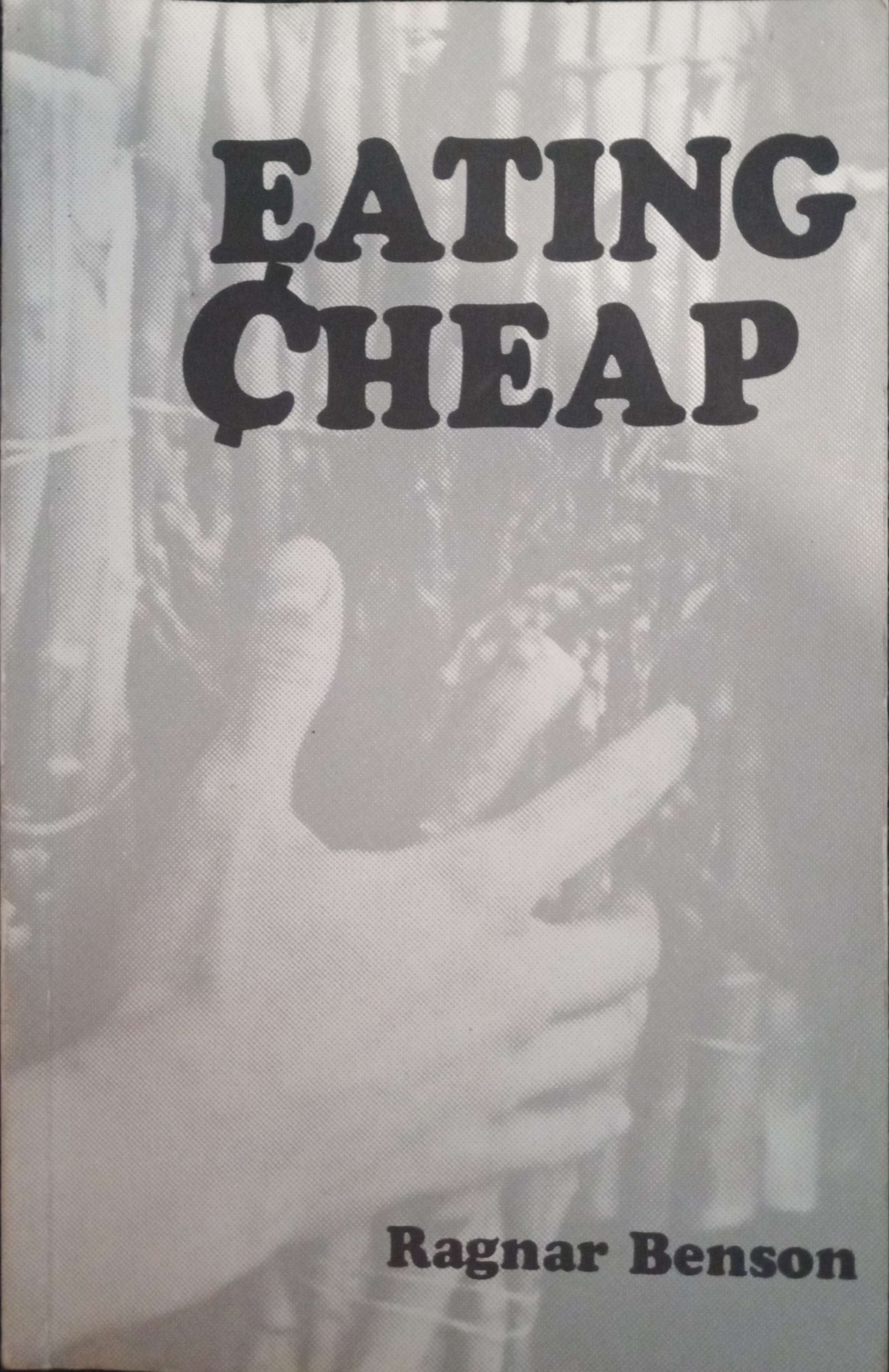

EATING ÇHEAP

Ragnar Benson

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by Ragnar Benson

A Paladin Press Book
Boulder, Colorado

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by Ragnar Benson

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PREFACE

Perhaps it will come as a surprise to those who have never had to live this way, but it is possible for Americans to eat for five dollars per week per person! In fact, many people are paying a whole lot less.

At this moment in time, there are quite a number of people living in the U.S. who do not steal, accept welfare, or suffer from malnutrition yet pay *absolutely nothing for the calories they consume.* Granted, these type folks generally live a simple rural existence quite different from that of the average person who is likely to read this book. Nevertheless, the fact remains that there are perhaps a million or more Americans who would never think of coughing up twenty-five dollars per bag of groceries yet eat well enough to stay in good health.

How do these rural folks do it? Generally, they keep a milk cow and a couple of steers on a few acres of pasture. They all raise large gardens, have access to a few fruit trees, a couple of colonies of bees, and a pig to eat the garbage. Also, these people are reasonably good scroungers of wild edibles such as cattails, hickory nuts, and raspberries. Nothing goes to waste, and everything is a potential food source. Some of the things they consume, such as possum, coon, and carp, are considered unappetizing and lacking in aesthetics by most people.

I realize that the real value of studying this type of person is limited. Some survival faddists might think this funky, rural lifestyle sounds idyllic, but as a practical matter, there isn't much to learn from reading about it. Most of us cannot and will not give up our current jobs for a totally new way of life in a two-room shack in rural Kentucky anyway.

On the other hand, people who live in the city and who are willing to give up some of their ingrained eating habits and forego some variety can get along quite nicely on five dollars a week. Back during the Depression, lots of us did it on fifty cents. The real cost figured in current dollars is probably about the same today. In a capitalistic economy where food is habitually overproduced, the constant dollar amount stays about the same year after year no matter what the inflation rate might be. Historically this has been true until society reaches the point where everything falls apart, and we all become a nation of beggars and scroungers. Then it becomes a matter of production which, by necessity, is the responsibility of each individual within that society.

At this point there are undoubtedly a number of skeptical readers with whom I could build a goodly amount of credibility by citing a specific example of a five-dollar-a-week food plan. If your urge to actually see one is unbearable, turn to page 91. There, for all the world to see, is a five-buck meal plan that will sustain life for months on end. The program is also so horribly boring that some will conclude starvation is a viable alternative.

Here you'll learn where food comes from and how it is processed, how farmers think and how to bargain with them. You will learn that food is ridiculously cheap where it is grown, before transportation, packaging, processing, storage, distribution, and government expenses

are added on, and that food processing operations are notoriously wasteful—waste that you can use for your own benefit. That, in a nutshell, is what this book is all about.

Some of the scrounging ideas offered here call for sacrificing huge amounts of pride but will keep a family comfortably fed without spending more than a few cents a week for bus fare. All it really takes is for you to start thinking about the possibilities. Everyone, everywhere can help themselves to waste and surplus food that will cut their food bills from 30 to 95 percent.

The information here is not tough to understand or apply. Yet most of it is totally foreign to modern Americans because we are so far removed from food production that the concepts may seem almost mystical.

It's probably better not to look yet at the diet prescribed in this book until you have read and assimilated the many concepts that go along with eating cheap. In this process, there is, in the most basic sense, both style and substance. One without the other becomes a bit grim.

Today's Cheap-Eating Family

A few years back, during my former life as a businessman, I had the opportunity to oversee the hiring of a general manager for a modest-sized assembly plant located in a small midwestern town. We required a self-starting, extremely well-rounded, intelligent person who could work all phases of the business and do so successfully for months on end without much supervision or guidance from the home office. The plant location, demands of the position, and pay scale were such that no one from the corporate level wanted the job.

After searching for a while, we were able to locate an outstanding man with excellent qualifications who

really wanted to work in a rural area away from the corporate biggies and bright lights of Metropolis. This fellow realized that his salary would be locked in at a reduced level but didn't mind. As it turned out, he never intended to do anything with his paycheck except invest every possible cent in second mortgage deeds of trust and other miscellaneous real estate paper.

He managed to perform this modern miracle of economics by refusing to spend one cent for heat (he cut his firewood and burned old tires), light (he had only one circuit running into the house), clothes (his wife bought from the Salvation Army and sewed), and most importantly, food. To his credit the fellow married a woman who was an absolute genius at feeding her family without the need of folding money. She raised a large garden, traded with the neighbors, haggled with the producers, and scrounged from the processors. In the off times, you could always count on finding her in the kitchen making raspberry freezer jam (using honey from her bee hives), drying beans, putting up apples, or bagging asparagus. At night, rather than watching TV, the family sat around snapping beans or cracking walnuts.

In the short time I knew them, these people reinforced my firm conviction that even a modern family can feed itself using little or no cash. The edibles are out there if you only know where to look and learn how to prepare them. Of course, you must be willing to go for it. Unfortunately for the government sociologists out there, it's a fact that eating cheap requires a good deal of intelligence, lots of perseverance, and a ton of hard work—none of which can be implanted via government programs.

The bottom line is that this family of cheap eaters is

the perfect role model for all of you who take this book seriously.

Soup Farm Lesson

I remember well back thirty years ago when my family lived near a Campbell Soup tomato and mushroom farm. After the main harvest was completed, literally tons of produce were left in the field to rot. This happened while some of the people in the immediate area clamored to be designated a poverty pocket so that more federal handouts might be given.

I asked my older brother why he thought these folks didn't help themselves a bit and go out and collect tomatoes and mushrooms like we did. There were enough lying in the fields to feed an army. Brother's answer was poetic in its simplicity.

"Simple," he said. "They're lazy, dumb, or both."

And so it is. Even in a collapsed economy, if you don't eat, don't blame anybody but yourself. As you read on, the necessary information will all be laid out. The only thing I can't give you is the ambition and intelligence needed to go out and put it together.

1. INDIA, CHINA, AND CHEAP EATER PHILOSOPHY

After giving it a hell of a lot of thought, I realized that India and China—two of the largest and most fascinating countries in the world—could teach us all a great philosophical lesson as far as learning how to eat cheap goes. You see, there is a vast difference in the way the people in these two respective countries go about eating. Here is where our lesson lies.

Trip to India

In late 1967, I agreed to handle a project that took me to New Delhi, Agra, and Calcutta in India, and then on to Katmandu, Nepal, and Rangoon, Burma. I didn't know it at the time, but I eventually ended up in several locations in China that must remain nameless at this time. A lot has transpired since those hectic days of the late 1960s, but many readers will understand that some of these places are sensitive business to this day.

Before leaving for my primary assignment in India, I had the opportunity to talk extensively with two elderly schoolmarms who had traveled to a great many places throughout the world, including my eventual destinations: India and China. After listening to them, I concluded that their information was unusually interesting if one discounted the editorial analysis.

"China is a delight," they said. "Neat, clean, well-

ordered and, in its way, practical and efficient. India, on the other hand, defies description. Both have similar population densities, climatic zones, topography, and natural resources—especially in the micro-agricultural sense. But you will hate India. The culture will make you sick, both physically and psychologically," they opined with a great deal of finality.

I am an incredibly intrepid traveler. In most cases, nothing bothers me. I don't need American food, American soap, American clothes, American entertainment, or for that matter, to speak English as my primary means of communication. My conclusion was that while these two old heifers might have some interesting opinions, they couldn't tell *me* that India was going to get the best of Ragnar Benson.

But, oh, how right they were! Two thick volumes would not be sufficient to describe the intolerable conditions the Indians subject themselves to. The misery they bring down on their own heads has to be some sort of world record for ignominy.

India Versus China

India is comprised of a little more than 1.2 million square miles. China's total land mass is 3.6 million square miles, but about .4 million square miles are rocky, inhospitable high mountains where few people live.

India's population is about 630 million, or a total density of close to 500 people per square mile. China has 800 million people. The overall density, including the uninhabited mountains, is less than 100 per square mile. This last figure is misleading at best and lacking in credibility at worst.

In terms of effective density, China has the highest concentration of people on earth. In the Yangtze River

Delta, for instance, about fifteen hundred people live on every square mile of rural ground. Many coastal Chinese cities have population densities that rival or exceed such notorious Indian cities as Calcutta, Chittagong, Port Said, and Karachi. A social scientist once told me in complete sincerity that if all the Chinese jumped up and down in unison they would rock the earth.

In terms of growing seasons influenced by weather and climate, the Indians definitely have the edge. Much of their country lies within a temperate, two-crop zone. Water for irrigation is, in many cases, much more available than it is in China.

In spite of what seems like extensive demographic and geographic similarities, there is no comparison in the two countries' ability to support themselves. The Indians, by and large, live and die a brutish, sordid death totally mired in filth and poverty. On the other hand, the Chinese are generally adequately fed and reasonably clothed. The outfits they wear are dreary in their sameness, but at least the Chinese don't run around in filthy rags.

Even the terrain contrasts sharply. India is hot, dry, and barren. China is emerald green and growing.

There is sometimes a tendency to explain away the differences between the two countries by contrasting their political systems. Readers may remember that India is democratic and China is socialist. In real life, however, it just ain't that simple. China definitely has a freer structure now than does India where the caste system still exists, with few rights being specifically reserved for the average citizen. China, in fact, is moving rapidly back to an individual system of private ownership and private enterprise with much individual responsibility.

The real reason the Chinese prosper and the Indians starve is rooted in their traditional religious and cultural practices.

In India I found that most hotels have three menus: a Hindu, a Moslem, and a Western (British) version. Some even throw in vegetarian and Sikh menus, bringing the total to five. Meanwhile, as the Indians are spending most of their waking hours fretting about what they can put in their mouths, the Chinese are eating anything and everything as long as it is clean and nutritious.

You see, in India the Hindus are worrying about not eating cows while the Moslems are worrying about not eating pigs. Some very religious Hindus even go so far as to sift through road and building excavation soil so that no bugs will be killed. In contrast, the Chinese eat birds' nests, shark fins, duck feet, bird bills, pork intestines, fish heads, grasshoppers, and dozens of other similarly strange items. The Chinese have even gone so far as to convince themselves that such fare is a delicacy and should be held in high regard.

While nearly one-fifth of India's total wheat supply (including the grain we send as a gift) is eaten by rats, the Chinese busy themselves catching the rats for dinner. These resourceful people also eat dogs, cats, rays, sculpins, slugs, bugs, ants, bees, and trees. They raise melons on their rooftops, vegetables in window boxes, carp in ponds, geese on the grass along the road, and on and on.

Learning to Help Yourself

I believe the China-versus-India lesson on how to eat cheap is clear at this point. It shows that if you are really determined to get along on very little money spent for food, you must put aside all of the cultural socio-economic barriers that our society has erected and

eat whatever is clean, nutritious, and available. Sometimes just recognizing what might be available is a big obstacle to overcome. That is one of the major purposes of this book. As an individual dedicated to spending only limited funds on food, you will be sensitized to the extensive food possibilities that are all around us. Some of my relatives made it through the Second World War in Germany because they had a two-hundred-liter barrel of castor oil stored in the basement. They ate oil mixed with leaves taken from the surrounding trees throughout the last winter of the war. It wasn't good, but they lived.

Some of my suggestions may initially sound repulsive. Americans are, by nature, very picky eaters. A good dose of the hungries often changes that in a hurry. On the positive side, the majority of Americans do not believe in any religious laws that proscribe any particular type of food source.

Sometimes it is tough to separate the two, but there is a difference between being psychologically ill and actually being physically sick. I remember making some Rendille tribesmen from northern Kenya so ill they threw up merely because *I ate a fresh fried egg.* That's all it took. On the other hand, this happened immediately after I watched them scarf down a tin plate full of fresh roasted grasshoppers. At least I didn't throw up. Readers should keep this point in mind too.

Eating cheap, according to my definition, carries with it the implied understanding that whatever is eaten must be clean and safe to ingest. A scrounger can't eat cheap if he is too sick to go out and search for food items.

I have in my files a hilarious newspaper clipping telling about the cheap eating habits of some South Vietnamese who'd been resettled in San Francisco. I am sure

the reporter didn't intend to write a humor piece, but that's sure as hell what he did—at least to my way of thinking.

It seems that the population of rabbits and squirrels in Golden Gate Park had obviously decreased for no apparent reason. As time went by, someone noticed that the ranks of stray dogs and cats in the park had thinned as well. Soon the park pigeons and blackbirds started joining this disappearing act. Eventually a park official decided to get to the bottom of the disappearing critter mystery. For a few days in a row, he observed park activities from a secret roost. One evening, he noticed a small Oriental man methodically making the rounds, so to speak, of all the stands of bushes and trees in the park. Our intrepid park official scurried out of his hiding place to investigate.

And what did he find? A trap line, complete with box traps and snares, all put together by a group of very resourceful South Vietnamese refugees! Every evening they would check the trap line for critters, harvest literally *anything* that was caught, and reset the traps and snares as need be.

By the way, the ninny who wrote this article went on to complain about the Vietnamese's cruelty to animals. What sort of monster could even consider eating those cute, furry, little animals, he wondered? That's a good one.

This same jerk is probably just as upset that these newcomers to our country didn't become wards of the state and accept food stamps, subsidized housing, and unemployment compensation. The fact is, these people were helping themselves.

And teaching you how to help yourself eat cheaply is exactly what I will do in the following pages.

2. THE ANT AND THE GRASSHOPPER

Everyone knows the old Ant-and-Grasshopper parable about working hard to store up food during the time of plenty against the time of need. The only problem is that the vast majority of Americans know only the concept; the practicalities involved were lost to most folks some forty or fifty years ago.

For the average person in this country, harvest is the time when one receives a paycheck and takes it to the supermarket where it is exchanged for food. The timing is related to whether or not money is available. There is no concept of seasons, yields, or any of the other considerations that are still very much a part of the food chain.

In spite of massive advancements in food production technology, most edibles are still extremely cyclic on a seasonal basis. Except for a few rare exceptions, food plants mature during a narrow specific time known as harvest. During the short time while harvest is in progress, a given fruit or vegetable is abundant. Before and after that specific time block, though, it is almost completely unavailable unless someone has invested labor, capital, and technology to preserve it. The life of produce after harvest is in most cases very, very short, unless humans intervene and make preparation for its preservation. Those of you who go down to the supermarket

with the naive assumption that fresh produce is stored for long periods of time at the cannery or packing house and is always available have to reorient your thinking. If you don't, you will continue to pay stiff off-season prices that will defeat even the best cheap-eating budget.

The Price of Processing

Some years back, I raised pickles on contract for one of the large packing houses. Much to my chagrin, I found that in spite of the good prices I thought I was receiving, I was practically giving my product away. After checking around a bit, I discovered that the label printer and the glass jar manufacturer were both getting more for their products than I was getting for my pickles. And I thought people were going to the store for the pickles, not the containers.

Modern producers of French fries, the kind you can buy at the hamburger stand for forty-five cents a small package, estimate that their costs stack up in the following order (from highest to lowest): labor to process, energy, boxes and packages, transportation, machinery and equipment, and way, way down at the end of the list, the cost of the spuds themselves.

My point is that most all food items are reasonably cheap if you are willing and able to harvest, transport, process, and store them yourself.

Just last fall, for instance, I bought big fresh Dungeness crab off the boats in Oregon for a mere $.80 each when they were selling in the supermarket 400 miles away in San Francisco for $2.10 a pound. The crabs I bought were slightly more than a pound each.

Some of the cost for processed foods that can easily be saved by individuals doing it themselves are connected with the price of government regulations. There

are, for instance, over two hundred different taxes on a Big Mac. Some forty-two thousand regulations apply to the sale of hamburger meat that moves through normal retail channels. All of this bureaucratic rigamarole adds tremendously to the cost of food without adding a great deal to its safety or nutrition.

On the other hand, laws regarding food handling sometimes work to the cheap eater's advantage. Because of foolish laws, good edible items become unsaleable. The cheap eater who is there when they are dumped can pick up some real bargains, but more about that later.

Storage During Abundance

The second point that must be made in this chapter is related to storing the abundant, cheap food that comes available at harvest time. This is not a primer on food storage. Yet a few broad principles of food storage should be kept in mind as you make your way to the library to find a book on canning, freezing, and drying. Remember that with each type of meat or produce there is a storage method that is far superior and far less troublesome than any other. Identify that method and you will have saved yourself lots of work as well as providing a better, more nutritious, more palatable stored food product.

Meats, for example, including poultry, fish, and red meat, should never be canned. It takes too long to process this way, even if you ignore the fact that most of the food value is destroyed. Instead, freeze meat or, if that isn't possible, consider drying it.

Fruits should always be canned. The natural acids make the job easy and safe.

I believe that vegetables, on the other hand, should never be canned. It is all too easy to botch up the job, creating some deadly poisons that can easily be avoided

by freezing the veggies in the first place. Also, the job is simpler and the product more nutritious when the green beans, red beets, fresh corn, or whatever are simply blanched and frozen. This last factor alone should preclude consideration of any other method.

Some products keep well in their natural state, given a modest amount of understanding and help. Potatoes, winter squash, onions, and apples are examples of foods that respond nicely to cool, humidity-controlled conditions that extend their shelf lives dramatically without any other processing.

Basic staple grains, pulses, and cereals such as rice, dried beans, dried corn, wheat, dried peas, lentils, nuts, barley, soybeans, and so on, are easy to keep in their harvested state *if* they are harvested properly and kept protected after harvest. The core secret is to keep the commodities dry and safely away from food predators such as rats, mice, and weavils.

There are some food items that cannot be commonly preserved unless they are turned into a horrible unpalatable state. For example, bananas can be mashed and frozen, but the thawed mess is so bad it is really tough to eat. Nevertheless, the banana gruel is still reasonably nutritious with value as a food item. A really hard-core, cheap-eating program will require many similar sacrifices!

Getting back to freezers, just last summer, one of the prominent government consumer gurus wrote a book that contained a section on the economic folly of owning a freezer. She took the value (at retail) of a twenty-cubic-foot model and depreciated it out over a ten-year period. To that she added the cost of buying electricity for it in New York City. As a last expense, she added 10 percent to the value of the supermarket foods she kept in the freezer as the cost of wrapping and protecting.

I have no objection to the way she amortized the freezer in her calculations, really. They do wear out, although even the homemade one my dad built right after the war in 1945 lasted longer than ten years. And, of course, the power company must be paid. However, I know of no cheap eater who does not own at least one freezer, even if they are back-country hillbillies. And these people would never ever even consider going to the butcher or the vegetable packers for their food, much less shop in the supermarket. The bottom line is, if the food is virtually free, and you store it in the freezer, the appliance makes a hell of a bunch of economic sense, no matter what the bureaucrats claim.

In defense of the government bureaucrat, I should point out that there are two reasons for owning a freezer: convenience and economy. The vast majority of Americans own freezers for the convenience they afford. No one who is serious about eating cheap should fall into that trap. Convenience in this case can cost dearly, if all the freezer saves you is a little trouble.

Along these same lines, home-canned food sometimes falls somewhere in the spectrum between necessity and recreation. When my old Russian grandmother passed away many years ago, we hauled out and dumped almost four hundred quarts of home-canned green beans. This canning activity was caused by both paranoia and necessity. She had been cruelly starved several different times during her younger years. In her declining years, she had little else to do but mind a garden and put up the production. Storing food was her response to a grim past and an uncertain future.

3. HOW MUCH FOOD IS ENOUGH?

The first time I met with Wild Bill Moreland was on a pack trip into the Little North Fork of the Clearwater River deep in Idaho's mountainous panhandle region. It was the early 1960s. We were scratching out a living on a small ranch in western Montana. There wasn't enough money to go to the movies, but we did get to do things for free which city people pay thousands of dollars to do. Horse-packing into the bush for eighteen-inch cutthroats is a good example here.

The first night out, our string of horses followed our beat-up old four-wheeler to a place called Buzzard's Roost. About five years earlier, the forest service tower there had blown down. They never rebuilt the lookout, but the location was a good jumping off place into some very rough primitive country.

We camped about three miles down the twisting, overgrown little trail on a terrace overlooking the river, which was only a tiny silver ribbon in the giant green chasm below us.

Perhaps an hour before daybreak, I climbed out of my bedroll, lit the Coleman, and went out to look at the horses. Despite the hobbles they wore, they were scattered out more than usual. After a bit I found three, brought them to camp, and caught three more as the stragglers came in to see what had happened to their buddies.

We didn't have a second lantern. By stoking up the fire, however, my three companions were able to start the camp chores. One saddled the stock, while another broke camp, and the third put breakfast on the fire.

Finally I returned with the last two horses and the lantern. I hung the sputtering light in a tree and was about to start helping with the chores when something caught my eye.

There, sitting on a log just at the edge of our circle of light, was a fifth person! It goes without saying that I was extremely surprised. I would have bet a day's wages that no human other than the four of us was within twenty-five miles of our location.

My shock must have been obvious.

"Hi," a strange little voice spoke up. "I am the Ridge Runner. I was camped near here and smelt your campfire. Came over to see if I could borrow some breakfast." Our odd visitor turned out to be Bill Moreland.

Readers who have read my book, *Live Off the Land in the City and Country*, will recall that I devoted a whole chapter to Bill Moreland and how he lived alone in the rugged Idaho Wilderness for thirteen years, making contact with humans only twice. Moreland referred to himself as the "Ridge Runner." People in that section of Idaho where he was already a legend called him the "Wild Man of the Clearwater."

This story occurred in the time after Bill was caught and brought out of the Clearwater snow country, between his stays in North Sand State Hospital, just a few years before and his mysterious death.

Breakfast that morning was leftover chili poured on top of giant thick pancakes. All of us were lean active people. We thought nothing about the quality or quantity of our food.

Moreland looked at our proposed breakfast with real fear in his eyes.

"How many of you is thar? " he asked cautiously.

"Four of us, and now one of you," I replied.

Moreland waited several minutes to respond. "All that food fer five people?" he asked incredulously.

Obviously the extended conversation was taking its toll on Bill. By breakfast's end, it was light enough to see. Here was a thin, muscular man, just over five feet tall, and weighing 115 pounds or so. He wore tattered, torn, old black cotton logger pants, a dirty wool shirt, a grossly deformed felt hat, and a pair of decent Penney's boots. A rope held up his pants and a small belt knife. By his side lay a small canvas pack with a bedroll tied beneath. The man, as was his custom, had no firearms that I could see. Moreland must have appreciated our grits. He had no teeth and would have had trouble with anything tougher than flapjacks, I thought.

The Amazing Wild Man

After breakfast we bade farewell to Moreland and headed off down the trail into the Little North Fork and across into the Mallard Larkins area. As best as I can determine, it was a twenty-seven mile trek, mostly on a line down the ridge and up the other side. We have discussed the following incident often since that day, and all of us who were involved agree that there were no shortcuts through the country.

About an hour before dark, after a hard, excruciating day's journey, we pulled up to our next camp east of Goat Mountain. Much to our surprise, there sat Bill Moreland!

"You fellas have so much food," he said by way of greeting, "that I thought I would come over and have supper with you." When it came to petty thieving or begging, no one got in line ahead of the Wild Man.

It is the custom of the bush to share food with those

in need. Besides, Moreland was interesting to talk to, so we had no objection if he stayed.

Our bull cook put two hamburger patties apiece on the fire. We had not stopped for lunch and all of us were famished. After a bit, Bill came over and went through the same routine again.

"You fixin' all that grub for five people?" he asked. "How the hell much do you guys eat, anyway?"

Later, Bill proved himself no glutton. He ate half a hamburger and wrapped the remainder in a filthy handkerchief, saving it for the next day.

The incident, for all its humor value, did impress on me the fact that we Americans eat way too much. We don't really need the variety or amount of food we consume. On the contrary, it is harmful that we eat as much as we do.

Overweight America

According to the American Society of Bariatric Physicians, almost 30 million Americans are at least 20 percent overweight. Furthermore, approximately 70 million, or one in three, are now dieting to one extent or another. The stored excess adult American fat collectively weighs more than 3 trillion pounds, according to George Armelaeos, a Massachusetts anthropologist. That much energy would propel 900,000 automobiles for 12,000 miles, he claims.

For the survivor and cheap eater, this overweight condition can be a serious problem. Not only will the individual try to maintain his calorie intake at previous gluttonous levels, thus jeopardizing food stores, but the very fact that the individual is overweight will cause lethargy and indifference. A lack of ambition is about as serious a problem as the cheap eater will run into. In the final analysis, it is often much

more serious than identifying available food supplies.

Occasionally I have encountered would-be survivalists who were grossly overweight, but who claimed that their stored body fat was part of their program. "When the crash comes," they say, "I will be able to live for months on what my body has stored."

Perhaps this is true. But in my experience, this kind of person never makes it. Anyway, the fact that Americans eat far too much should give a great deal of aid and comfort to the dedicated cheap eater.

Nutritional Requirements

As a general rule, male humans require about sixteen calories per day per pound of body weight to stay in good health. Females need about fourteen calories. Along with this, humans must also consume a basic package of required proteins, vitamins, and minerals. These minimum daily requirements have pretty well been defined by scientific research. More on this later.

However, it isn't quite that simple. Several other mitigating conditions come into play as humans get right down to the line as far as daily nutritional requirements are concerned. More stored body fat, for instance, triggers greater insulin production which in turn causes a person to suffer additional hunger pangs, take on more food, and burn it off, studies have found. This explains the common dieter's syndrome wherein a given limited calorie intake per day leads to a weight loss down to a certain level, at which no additional weight is lost. In effect, the body has learned to use the fuel it is receiving more efficiently. This is also true to a certain extent with vitamins and minerals. How else can one explain the fact that the Roman soldiers lived for dozens of years on nothing but wheat gruel, or that East African

natives exist today principally on *posho* (ground wheat and corn) cakes and very little else?

Of course, climate and work load have a lot to do with it. People who live in cold places, or who cannot heat their homes, or who lack adequate clothing require more food to produce internal energy. Cheap eaters should therefore be careful about how they dress, but they will generally have to be active. This in itself will require that more calories be eaten than if one were to lay around all day. But the point is most people don't require as much food as they are currently eating, a factor that will help cut the food bill even if all else fails.

Many of the feed grains and other basic foods available to the cheap eater are high in fiber. Fiber is undigestible cellulose that moves through the digestive tract without providing a great deal of calories, vitamins, or minerals. Nutritionists tell us that modern men require more fiber than they presently get from most diets, which is another plus for those considering cuts in their food expenses.

Admittedly, a lot of the staple foods available to the cheap eater are awfully boring. They may seem tasty enough on a twice-a-month basis, but day in and day out, they become tiring. This fact works to the advantage of the cheap eater, since sheer boredom will prevent him from eating very much of the same old stuff.

As a result, another problem arises. People on basic diets generally have some trouble getting the right balance of needed vitamins and minerals. It is possible, of course, to become a health food nut and tinker around with your food supplies till the proper balances are reached. However, I always felt there were more important things to worry about, and I was never sure I would know if I was getting the program down properly, any-

way. For that reason, I take vitamins. At this writing, excellent complete vitamin capsules containing all of the minimum daily requirements of both vitamins and minerals can be purchased for about six cents each. On a per month basis, the cost is less than two dollars, depending on which brand of vitamins you buy, and whether or not they are purchased wholesale.

Let's, for the sake of discussion, assume you bought a bushel of rice (sixty pounds) for four dollars, fifty pounds of lentils for twelve dollars, and ate that with a ham bone the slaughter house gave you, plus ten pounds of chicken necks that you bought for one dollar. In addition, you were able to scrounge some apples and carrots out of a dumpster. Add vitamins to this menu and, lo and behold, you have a fairly balanced diet. Everything is pretty well there, including the protein adult humans need. Cost for the month—well under twenty dollars!

Keep in mind that while much of the protein you will require can come from pulses like pinto beans, garbanzos, or peas, some amino acids will still be missing. That's why the early settlers cooked beans with salt pork and why pea soup is better for you with a chunk of meat cooked in with it.

Lots of combinations will come close. The southwestern Indians ate beans and corn with an occasional sage grouse thrown in. Some places, oranges and grapefruits are available that provide vitamin C and are filling as well.

As you begin to implement your cheap food program, it will become apparent that you will not require as many calories or as great a variety as you once thought necessary, as long as all of your minimum daily nutritional requirements are filled. In many cases, you will feel better and be more active. And your food costs will be much lower to boot.

4. THE FINE ART OF GLEANING

Virtually everyone lives in an area where some kind of commercial crop is produced. It may be apricots, cabbage, carrots, buckwheat, barley, watermelons, onions, or any of a host of other products. But always the ground will grow something well.

City people are often surprised to learn that food crops are highly regional in nature. There are a few types, such as corn, wheat, soybeans, and oats, that can be successfully grown on a commercial basis over a wide area. Some other edibles only do extremely well in a relatively limited growing area but can be grown to a limited extent over a wide range of country. Carrots, radishes, potatoes, walnuts, plums, spinach, and cucumbers are good examples of these types of crops. They grow exceptionally well in a few places and satisfactorily in many others.

Sometimes the exact place where specialized crops are grown is decided by the market. Factors such as transportation and proximity to large population centers enter into it, but generally farmers will raise a crop which they have found from experience grows best and easiest in their particular locale.

A few types of produce are extremely regional in nature and cannot be produced outside their respective areas no matter what the price. One cannot raise avocados in Chicago or oranges in Denver. Other examples

are lemons, artichokes, macadamia nuts, pineapples, grapefruits, and pecans. The reason this is true has to do with the soil and climatic conditions found in specific regions. Considerations such as frost-free days per year, average day and night temperature, soil composition, amount, frequency, and season of rainfall, humidity, fertility, underground soil profile, insect pests, and diseases all play an important part in providing the narrow, specific environment many crops must have to prosper.

Some crops tolerate a relatively wide range of climatic conditions or, as is more generally the case, the crop is fairly specific, but there is a huge amount of real estate that falls within the required parameters. Corn is an excellent example. If the soil isn't slightly basic, very fertile, deep, and rich, if the nights for at least forty days aren't warm, and if there is not an inch of water a week during the growing season adding up to thirty inches for the year, then the area won't yield enough to make planting corn worthwhile. Happily, roughly one-third of the United States has this type climate, so as a nation, we grow lots of corn.

My point in rehearsing all of this is to show that every area has a couple of commercial crops that thrive, and most probably quite a few more that do pretty well. This in turn should alert the cheap eater to several other realities he may not have considered. There is going to be something that is really abundant in your area, a few items that are commonly available, and many, many items that are costly and for all intents and purposes not available. We are back to the old boredom syndrome again. Identify and eat what the area produces and you won't starve. It just will become incredibly boring after a while, even if your diet consists of fresh peaches and crab legs.

Raw Food Sources

Generally, raw food items arriving in the consumer's hands fall into two broad source categories. First there are the huge agribusinesses which grow commercial crops such as feed for livestock and the more common vegetables that end up being processed by the large canning and freezing operations.

Second, there are the truck and produce farmers who, in a limited sense, raise their crops for sale directly to the consumer.

As a general rule, this latter type of produce finds its way into "farmer's markets." That's why I usually recommend that people refrain from buying at these places. The food is produced at a relatively high cost per unit as a result of its limited production and the fact that it may not be ideally suited to the area in which it is being raised.

Of course there are exceptions. Occasionally a small farmer may sell at prices that amount to a loss on the cost of production, or the crop may be mass-produced by large, efficient commercial farmers in a given area and then funneled into the farmer's market channel for direct sale to the consumer.

Sweet corn or pickles are good examples here. In areas where they are commercially produced, they are inexpensive. There may be little incentive to go out to the farms and glean the fields, since they may be so very cheap in the local markets. In many farm areas, however, corn and pickles will grow but not very well. In these cases, truck farmers raise the stuff as a sort of semidelicacy to be sold at high prices in the farmer's markets.

Some home economists recommend going one step further up the distribution ladder and buying food prod-

ucts from wholesalers or packers. Especially if you buy food in season, this approach can save money. But I am not interested in saving money; I am interested in eating virtually for free. Try these places if you like, but don't be satisfied with them any more than you are with the farmer's markets. There is a better game in town.

I mentioned earlier that food from the farm source is cheaper than the box it is contained in at the store. Another corollary to keep in mind is that if the food underwent any processing at all, that operation was almost certainly more expensive than buying the raw ingredients in the first place.

For those who don't believe me, consider the following. At this writing, corn is selling for $2.65 per bushel. A bushel weighs sixty pounds. Along with a $5.00 bottle of vitamins, some dried beans, and a modest amount of other scrounged items, the corn would feed a man for a month.

Oats are $2.20 per thirty-two pound bushel. Sorghum is $5.30 per hundred pounds. Sunflower seeds are relatively expensive at $12.00 per hundred pounds, wheat is $3.70 per sixty pounds, potatoes are $3.50 per hundred pounds, sugar beets are $1.50 per hundred pounds, and so on. Obviously it would be cheap to go out to the farm and buy a year's supply of any of these staples.

In 1977 the Department of Agriculture conducted a study to determine what percentage of the average consumer's food dollar actually went back to the farmer. They concluded that, taken as a whole, the farmer only received *thirty cents* out of every dollar spent on food at the store. The remaining seventy cents went to pay for transportation, processing, and distribution. A lion's share of this latter amount was taxes. There are over

Some processing is involved with almost all edible products we buy in the supermarket today. As a general rule, the more processing that is involved, the less the farmer receives, and the more you can save by transporting and processing yourself, not to mention the taxes which are avoided.

The following is a partial list summarizing the U.S. Department of Agriculture findings on the farmer's share of your food dollars:

Product	Farmer's Share
Eggs	66%
Pork	60%
Beef	59%
Chicken	56%
Dried Beans	42%
Tomatoes	41%
Onions	38%
Lettuce	34%
Apples	33%
Potatoes	30%
Oranges	23%
Milk	54%
Peanut Butter	37%
Flour (in bags)	31%
Rice	28%
Bread	10%
Corn Flakes	8%

This means that if potatoes are selling for ten dollars in the store, the farmer is only getting three dollars! Think about these facts in regards to going out and buying your food direct from the producers. It makes even more sense.

The Fine Art of Gleaning

The prices that farmers ask for when they sell their products to you are actually unimportant. Usually you will not have to pay that much anyway. Good nutritious produce can be acquired in exchange for the labor invested in gleaning it from the fields! That's what this chapter is all about. What I am saying is that you can get the stuff for free if you are only willing to go out into the harvested fields and pick it up. The best examples that come to mind are tomatoes and cabbage. All agricultural crops are seasonal to some extent. Some are highly seasonal. On these, the harvest must, for a variety of reasons, be made within a very narrow range of days or the economic consequences may be severe for the farmer. This is virtually always true with produce. If it is not harvested at exactly the right time, much of it will spoil, or be blemished by weather, insects, diseases, or ruined by some combination of all these factors.

Couple to this the necessity in our culture of harvesting by machine, and you have a situation with great potential for the cheap eater who knows how to glean. Machines miss more produce than hand laborers do. Unlike hand harvesting, it costs a fixed amount to run over a given piece of ground, no matter how great or small the yield. Either because of economics or because of the nature of the crop, farmers seldom, if ever, machine harvest twice. Also, in many cases, the machines will not harvest immature produce. Either it is left in the field to ripen or is thrown out on the ground as refuse. Later, when the remaining produce matures, the gleaner can go out and pick it up, investing nothing more than the price of his time.

I already mentioned that my family once lived near a

Campbell's Soup production farm that raised tomatoes and mushrooms. Each year after the tomato harvest was over, we were allowed to go in and glean out the late maturing and leftover fruit for our own use. I can't remember ever working more than four hours to get ten bushels of tomatoes. My wife canned them up, made tomato paste, tomato soup, and we ate them sliced for at least five weeks. Other times of the year we were able to do the same glean routine with mushrooms. They were the ones that were harvested too late for one reason or another and had grown to the point of having brown gills under the caps. The mushrooms were stronger tasting than those we bought in the store. They tasted much like wild mushrooms. Evidently they were not saleable, but we thought they were very good.

Another time, we lived in a truck crop area of southern California. There was so much cabbage left in the fields after the farmers harvested that it paid them to contract with a Mexican produce dealer to come in with a crew from south of the border and haul the surplus away. We went in at the same time and got all the cabbage we needed for a year in less than one hour. Processing wasn't even much of a chore. My wife shredded the cabbage into a thirty gallon plastic pail and pickled it.

Apples, pears, plums, and other similar orchard crops are additional good examples of edible products that can often be gleaned for the price of your labor. Either go into the orchard at harvest and ask to clean up some of the apples on the ground, or wait till well after harvest time and see about gleaning the extra apples.

A good, workable rule is that perishable produce or crops requiring additional processing or packing can be gleaned. Feed grains or products that essentially go from the farmer to the consumer (through middlemen, of

course) must be purchased. As I pointed out earlier, however, purchase "in the field" is extremely reasonable. Examples of the first category are apples, oranges, lemons, asparagus, sweet corn, cucumbers, carrots, potatoes, lettuce, and pineapples. Feed grains are the hard corn, wheat, barley, seed crops that usually end up inside chickens, hogs, or beef. Grains and pulses that for all practical purposes go directly to the consumer are rice, dried beans, dried peas, and lentils.

The Gleaning/Field Purchase Plan

Developing a gleaning/field purchase plan requires intelligence and initiative. Oddly enough, even though a good, varied diet can be put together using this method, not enough people actually go out and do it. The only ones I know of who live entirely by this means are small farmers or people who live in an agricultural environment. Probably this is a result of our culture being too many generations removed from the earth. Or perhaps we as a nation—even the poorest of us—don't much like the inconvenience and work involved with going to the farm for our food.

For those who resolve to give it a try, run the program basically as follows. Start by making an accurate determination as to what crops are grown commercially in your area. Remember that there will be primary products and secondary ones which are more costly to produce and are usually intended for the local farmer's markets. In some cases, it will take a bit of work to find out what's happening here.

You can determine what crops are commercially grown by calling the county extension agent at the court house, calling the state land grant college if it is in the area, visiting farm organizations such as the

Grange or the Farm Bureau, visiting farm stores, or by simply taking a drive in the country.

Another productive procedure is to look in the telephone book yellow pages under food processors. Find out where the food is being processed and then drive out some afternoon to see about gleaning some of it. Don't be surprised if there is no one around except for the caretaker, and the plant looks like it was deserted years ago. Canning, packing, and freezing operations, with a few exceptions such as potatoes, soybeans and sugar beets (which can be successfully stored in an unprocessed state), operate only for a few weeks each year. The remainder of the year the plant sits idle.

Ask the watchman what they produce at the plant, and when they expect their busy season. This information can be the opening wedge for a wealth of data about ag production in your area.

Some crops can be purchased well after the harvest from farm storage containers known as elevators. Invariably, however, these consist of feed grains and not produce. To successfully operate as a gleaner, you will have to know when the harvest occurs. The elevator can be a gold mine of information about specifics concerning your local harvest. So even if you don't buy from the people running the elevator, it is helpful to talk to them.

Remember, dates you think will be gleaning times are only relative. Some years it may be hot and dry, bringing the harvest on early. Other years any of the crops may react differently. The harvest may be extremely late. It could be as much as a month or more after your projected date.

Your personal gleaning plan at times will have to rely on your own ability to recognize the various local crops

growing in the fields. You should also be able to tell the state of the crop as it progresses toward maturity. Otherwise you may miss the harvest for the year and the accompanying opportunity to glean the fields, purchase directly, or obtain bargains from the processor, which is our next subject.

Processing Plants

An easy place to find cheap produce at harvest time is at the processing plant. Tons of the stuff is thrown away as refuse each day. Done in moderation, inobtrusively, I have never been refused permission to go through the garbage piles.

Simply go to the plant and ask to speak to the shift foreman. Tell him you are unemployed but have decided to work at putting up some food for winter by sorting through the various packing plant refuse piles and by talking to local farmers and ranchers. This approach always works. Often the foreman will be so surprised, he will give you a couple of big sacks of his product and wish you well.

Part of the secret when making this request is to stress that you are working at gleaning food because the economy and/or your circumstances will not allow you to work at your regular job. The other part is to wear very clean, very old, well-repaired cotton clothing. Farmers and ranchers seldom wear polyester except when they dress up. Generally try to wear what they do, which will probably be Levis, bib overalls, a long-sleeve cotton work shirt, and/or tan cotton work pants.

Don't dress up or down. Don't try to look mod or stylish. Farmers and producers are subconsciously uncomfortable around people outside their group and may turn you down for reasons that they themselves can't articulate.

Getting the Farmer's Permission

Your best bet when approaching a farmer or orchard owner is to go to the home place about two weeks before harvest. The home place is where the farmer lives. Remember that often these people farm tremendous acreages, mostly rented from others. Sometimes the person renting the home on the farm will allow you to glean the fields, but as a general rule, you will have to ask the farmer who actually owns the crop, which requires going to his home place.

Use the same approach and the same dress for the farmer that you used for the processing plant foreman. Ask if you could buy some of the produce gleaned from the field after the harvest. If you can work the fact into the conversation that you are not going to rile the livestock, bring other people with you, break down the fences, leave gates open, or steal anything, so much the better.

Be sure to offer to pay. Farmers almost invariably offer to pay for everything, but on the other hand never actually require payment for small items. A knowledge of this little ritual will help immensely. They will think you are one of them.

As a general rule, even educated farmers who have been to the university are shy and somewhat reclusive. Contrary to what you may believe, they generally have little disposable income, lots of debts, and operate in a very technical environment. They spend a great deal of time talking to each other and nobody else, and they work hard for long hours every day of the week. Remember that many farmers don't smoke or drink, especially in the Midwest.

Be sure to target your requrest. Ask if you might pick up the cull potatoes after they run the digger

through, pick up apples under the trees, buy some of the pumpkins left after harvest, pick the beans again after the field hands are through, and so on. As I said before, all of this requires a good working knowledge of the agricultural picture in your area.

Because farmers—even modern farmers—live a tough life, they are sympathetic to a person with an honest hard-luck story who is willing to pay modestly and is also willing to work for what he gets. Many times it is best to talk to the farmer's wife first. She can really be a pushover and will usually volunteer a lot of information. She may even intercede for you with the old man.

Keep in mind that some farmers no longer store feed grains on their place. They might be willing to sell a few bags of corn or peas, but one day after the harvest is complete, everything is at the elevator

Some years farmers have nothing to sell. Crop failures are still all too common, especially on a regional basis. When that happens, it is usually extremely difficult to buy or glean anything. The general rule is that 1 percent less crop increases the price 2 percent. Of course, if there is an abundance, the formula works the other way as well.

It's What You Spend . . .

During the late 1940s, I ran our family place back in the Midwest for a while. It was a corn-hog operation, with a few parent cows and the occasional field of soybeans that we raised every couple of years.

Not too long after I got back on the place—I was raised there and then left to live in the city for a few years—a likeable fellow by the name of Tom Brooke stopped by the farm. I hadn't known him before that time, although he apparently had lived in our area most of his life. Tom claimed that he had an 85 percent dis-

ability incurred as a result of flying in high-altitude, unpressurized planes during the war. Tom seldom worked that I knew of. He was married and had one child.

At any rate, Tom Brooke was a gleaner and a scrounger *par excellence.* He tooled around in an ancient green DeSoto that he never drove over twenty miles per hour. He used junkyard parts to keep his car running so he could come out to wrangle food from the local farmers.

At times Tom hit us up for green beans out of our garden, grabbed a couple of bushels of corn from the fields, scavenged sweet corn from the processing plant, bought a bushel of oats now and then, picked up walnuts, and generally put together his family's grocery needs, *without spending any actual cash.* To his credit, he sure worked hard at it. The guy led a very quiet life and probably spent less than a dollar a week for food. I thought I was a good improvisor, but this fellow forgot more than I will ever learn.

Tom Brooke is dead and gone now. He lived a full life, proving the old adage it isn't what you make that counts. It's what you spend. And he didn't spend much. That I am sure of.

5. CHEAP MEAT SOURCES

Cheap eaters who are truly dedicated to a no-money food plan will find that, at times, they will have to invest every ounce of ingenuity and energy they possess into making their programs work. On the other hand, they will have to diversify their plans in as many ways as possible. Otherwise, vagaries in supply coupled with constant nutritional requirements will eventually defeat them in the long run.

Cheap sources for meat protein are among the most difficult to develop, especially for the average city dweller. It is true that you can always buy dried beans or rice to live on. After a bit these grains will become more palatable, but this is still awfully dull fare. It is sometimes even possible to fall into a pattern of eating grains and nothing more. This approach is not without its drawbacks and dangers. One of my boys, for instance, knew a college girl who ate nothing but soaked boiled barley. I believe her motivation for doing so had to do with a cult she joined. At any rate, by March of her junior year, she had lost so much weight that she passed into a coma one night and never recovered.

Picking up free or low-cost meat products is sometimes a tough job, but one that the cheap eater must consider if he is serious. As I have pointed out, the variety is nice, but the nutrition is essential.

Back to the Farm

Though farms might seem like a natural jumping-off point for this chapter, they are actually uncertain places to go for meat products. Many farmers buy meat from stores themselves, never eating the livestock produced on their own farms or in their areas. There are a number of reasons for this. The most obvious and insurmountable is that many farmers raise only cash crops and might not have so much as a hog or a milk cow on the spread. For them, the economics of raising animals are not practical, so they have abandoned the raising of livestock altogether.

Other farmers and ranchers may raise livestock, but the operation will probably be so large and automated that it is prohibitively costly for them to fool around selling a two-hundred-pound hog or fifty chickens. Part of this problem is a result of livestock maturing to market size at infrequent intervals. By some fortuitous circumstance, the cheap eater might be there on market day, but that's a chance in a hundred. Even then the farmers are conditioned to move all of their livestock out at once, usually in a big hurry. They won't stop to sell one calf or sheep while they are loading up entire semis or cattle cars.

Yet there are some exceptions. Most large automated livestock farms have only limited provision to handle cripples or runts. There is a possibility that you could buy a cheap hog, for example, that broke its leg or only grew half the size of the others. Underweight, damaged, and deformed critters are heavily discounted by livestock buyers. Usually the farmer or rancher will sell them anyway to get rid of them. If you point out the fact that you would like to have runts and cripples, you may be able to make yourself a good deal.

Before talking to a livestock producer with this idea in mind, you must understand that all slaughter animals are marketed at a predetermined weight. This weight is tied in with an ideal age that has been fixed after many years of experience on the part of thousands of producers. Hogs, as an example, reach 220 pounds at about six months. At this time they are always sold. By past experience, the farmer and buyer know that if the hogs are held longer, they will put on mostly fat and little meat. Any weight gain will thus take longer, therefore costing the producer more because feed efficiency declines dramatically after 220 pounds. I have actually received less per head for hogs weighing 100 pounds more than top grade 220-pound slaughter hogs, because of this reason.

I have also sold eight-month-old runt hogs weighing 120 pounds for ten dollars each just to get them off the farm! These guys would no longer put on a pound, no matter how much I fed them. The commercial buyers didn't want them, so I let them go cheap.

Here's a farm story which might be of value to cheap eaters. It occurred on one of those hellishly hot humid days that America's Midwest is so famous for. By early afternoon, the temperature was pushing 105°F in the shade. Compound this with the extremely high humidity, and the fact that I had to work at hard physical labor out in the sun most of the day, and you've got the picture.

About four in the afternoon I made my rounds to the hog house to run the manure augers. Our hog houses were all set up on center sloping floors with power cleanouts in the middle. These augers were powered by two horsepower, 220-volt electric motors. To protect

the augers, the gutters had expanded steel mesh gratings over them.

One floor, or pen, housed close to one hundred-fifty 220-pound hogs in it. My intention was, as soon as the weather moderated a bit, to call in a truck and send the hogs off to market. However, to do so during the heat wave was to invite certain disaster. Under those extreme conditions, as many as 20 percent of the hogs might die from heart attacks.

I threw the switch on the auger, but nothing happened. The motor didn't run, hiss, hum, or smell. Yet it seemed as though the hogs screamed and hollered a bit more than usual. I threw the switch again but got nothing but more squealing. A third try was similarly unproductive, so I went in to have a look.

The sight in the pens was truly horrifying, particularly to a poor farmer like myself. There, lying on the floor, were dozens and dozens of dying hogs. Some were gasping, some were quivering, and some were just lying there dead.

As I soon found out, a mouse had eaten through one leg of the 220-volt lines to the motor, allowing it to short out on the steel grating. Any hog standing on the grating got a huge electric shock, made several times more lethal by its bare hooves and the wet pasty environment. I realized with horror that every time I'd thrown the lever, I gave them another hefty shock.

After a herculean effort, I was able to revive all but five of the poor critters. These I hauled out of the pen into the barn lot where I dumped them under a huge old Chinese elm.

When my oldest boy stepped off the school bus that day, I immediately set him to spraying the heap of defunct pork with a garden hose. It didn't really cool them

off much, but there was no question that it helped some. Meanwhile, my wife phoned two neighbors who worked in a small foundry. In spite of a brutal day at work, they came down and helped me hang the hogs and dress them. Due to the time factor, we did not scald the porkers but opted instead to skin them. The hams are not as good this way, but under the circumstances, we had little choice.

That night, all members of the three families involved got together for a hog butchering party. By working diligently, we were able to cut and wrap all of the pork and have it in our freezers by first light. It was a horrible job, but each of us got almost two hundred pounds of pork out of the deal, which at the time was worth a small fortune. Almost eighty dollars as I remember.

There is one footnote to the above incident that might be of interest. Not only did my two neighbors work their way into a big supply of free pork, but in our haste we threw away a large amount of edible products. No one saved the liver, kidneys, diaphragm, and heart, or did anything with the head, or for that matter attempted to render the lard away from the skin. From those five hogs we probably dumped enough additional good meat protein to feed a man for six months.

As I said earlier, farms are not generally good places to get meat. But never give up and never let an opportunity go by. You never know what you might put together if you try.

This even applies to getting milk from the dairy farmer. Because virtually all dairies are now automated, I have never in the last twenty-five years been able to buy milk right from the cow. But you never know. Someone might have a pet milk cow they keep for their kids and be willing to sell the surplus at reasonable rates.

Sharp readers will have already noted that the inherent weakness of any plan to buy unprocessed meat from the farm is that the cheap eater must have a reasonably good way of hauling the critter home and then must also be knowledgeable regarding slaughtering and packing. I have processed large deer and sheep in a small apartment, so it can be done. The cutting edge is determination and the will to acquire the requisite skills. Read chapter ten for more information on do-it-yourself butchering methods.

Slaughterhouses

As a general rule, slaughterhouses (as opposed to the local butcher shops which we will discuss later) are set up to process only one kind of animal. That is, they will butcher hogs but not sheep or cattle, or vice versa. Even the modest, custom, rural shops will not do both poultry and red meat. The butchering setups are entirely different.

New, stringent, federal slaughterhouse inspection regulations have virtually doomed the small custom cutter. Every rural town used to have a couple. Now there might be one or two per county if the area is basically agricultural. And these exist only because the inspectors haven't gotten around to closing them up. As a result, you might have to drive for miles to find a small slaughterhouse. It's either that, or make do with the less sympathetic, large commercial meat packers.

During the interim, while they are being put out of business, the small local slaughterhouses can be a good source for meat products. In some cases, federal laws or the local interpretation thereof guarantees that many good edible products must be thrown out. In this regard, federal regulations work to the advantage of the cheap eater. The best examples are chicken hearts,

livers, and gizzards. Slaughterhouses are being required to purchase extremely expensive, high-pressure washing equipment and separate holding facilities for these parts. Most packers won't spend the money since the local market will not support the added expense. As a result, these items are thrown out with the entrails, or saved and sold for a few cents a pound for cat food.

Cheap eaters can either get these chicken parts for free, or by paying perhaps ten cents a pound. Note that you must always maintain that the products are not to be used for human consumption when talking to the packing plant manager. If the meat products are fresh, the only precaution you need take is to wash them thoroughly, and eat or freeze them quickly when you get them home.

Most people know how to prepare poultry hearts and livers, but may not be so sure about gizzards. I remember one time when we were given 7 five-gallon pails full of gizzards in a week's time. This occurred when our local poultry packing plant was in full operation. Handling thirty-five gallons of chicken gizzards represents a lot of work if they are all cut open and completely cleaned and washed. A much faster but more wasteful practice is to cut the meaty ends off the gizzards and throw the rest away. Just be sure you have an overabundance of meat before you start on this approach, because it *is* wasteful.

Gizzards are especially good served fried with a cream sauce over rice. Depending on the age, parboil or boil the gizzards till tender. Drain. Flour and fry in bacon fat, chicken fat, or lard. Remove to a pan lined with a paper towel to soak up excess grease, and keep warm in the oven. To the pan drippings add a bit more flour, some milk, and stir till you get a cream sauce. Salt and pepper to taste. Arrange the gizzards on a warm

platter, pour the cream sauce over them, and serve with rice, greens, and cornbread. Another tasty way to serve gizzards is to simply boil them in salted water to which you've added an onion, carrot, or old piece of celery and a bay leaf if you have one. Drain, and serve with boiled potatoes and horseradish.

Another type of meat part that is very cheap whenever poultry is slaughtered are the backs and necks. As recently as two weeks ago, we purchased chicken backs and necks from a processor for ten cents a pound. Two and one-half pounds is usually plenty for a family of four. A pound of necks in soup will feed a small army.

Small slaughterhouses often do business on a custom basis. That means they butcher animals on contract for the people who raised them. Often this precludes them from being able to give you anything. On the other hand, many producers are fussy about what they want and will leave some good meat parts with the butcher. Kidneys, heart, liver, and bull testicles are good examples. Another product that could become hamburger but is often thrown out is the diaphragm. On sheep or hogs, there isn't a whole lot to the diaphragm. But taken from a thousand-pound steer, the diaphragm will provide a nice steaklike cut of meat that will last a family a month.

Larger packing plants that "break" or cut up red meat may have a supply of soup bones for sale. Odd scraps of meat are also saved in clean containers and sold for processing or to pet food people. At times these can be purchased. The problem here is that often the larger packing plants will not want to fool with a couple hundred pounds of meat scraps or a barrel of bones. Also, you may not be equipped to handle this much meat product all at one time.

At this writing, the government inspection require-

ments for meat are extremely stringent. Bruises must be cut out in large chunks as I mentioned earlier. At times, evidence of disease will cause the entire carcass to be downgraded to pet food status, although when well cooked it is perfectly safe to eat. I have passed myself off as the owner of a large kennel and made some stupendous buys on beef and lamb from meat processors. Several times we picked up more meat than we could put in the freezer. It's all a matter of how you present yourself and how well you impress the shift foreman or the plant manager.

Seafood Sources

People who live near commercial fisheries, either fresh or salt water, should check for cheap food buys at the local packing plants where the fish are processed. In the West there are commercial trout ponds, in the South catfish ponds, and along the coastlines numerous processing plants. Often these places will have culled or damaged fish which, if picked up fresh, are tasty and cheap. Usually damaged goods of this sort are less expensive than if you bought from the fish farmer or the boat captain direct. I have purchased lobsters in Maine and crabs in Oregon that had died on the boat and were undersized. Such shellfish cannot be sold. The price I got them for was very, very cheap. Just be sure they're fresh.

On the other hand, in the early 1970s I fished salmon and cod commercially out of Campbell River, Vancouver Island, British Columbia. We used a seventeen-foot, open boat and conventional reels and rods. Rock cod brought fifty-five cents in the round, ling were seventy-eight cents, and salmon got up to a dollar at times. Rock cod in the two-to-four pound range were easiest to catch. Three of us caught a hundred pounds or more

an hour. That's fifty-five dollars for one hour's work split three ways, and we are talking about a time when the dollars were bigger, rounder, and harder than they are today.

Anyway, a couple of times people tried to buy fish direct from our boat. Invariably they were turned off when they heard the prices we were asking. If they had only known that at the packing plant, cull fish of the same varieties could be had virtually for the taking! Of course, the finished, processed product, packed and graded, was several dollars a pound.

As I said earlier, I believe that meat is important to the cheap eater's health. It is vital that you occasionally have some chicken necks for the barley soup, or a ham bone for the lentils. Hitting the slaughterhouses and processing plants isn't the entire answer, but is well worth pulling out of the cheap eater's bag of tricks at times.

6. SCROUNGING

In common street terms, scrounging is the act of sorting through an otherwise worthless pile of trash for items that have utility and thus value. In this case, we are talking about scrounging food, yet the principles are the same no matter what a man's treasure might be.

Somewhere in the process, many people seem to forget that there are two elements that are absolutely essential to a successful scrounging effort. One is the time and energy combination, commonly known as work. The other is the native intelligence necessary to identify opportunities that others have missed. In other words, scrounging takes a good bit of hard work along with the alertness to spot a good deal. Perhaps this is why so few people are really good scroungers. The average person in our society isn't very smart a lot of times and most of them certainly are lazy, it seems to me.

In terms of disposable income, two of the wealthiest men I have ever known owned junkyards. They wandered around all day long every day of the year collecting scrap copper, old batteries, car bodies, and anything else of any value at all. Even the IRS didn't seem to know what these people were worth. But when it came to the ability to pay cash for whatever they wanted, these guys were in a class by themselves.

As with any scrounger, the principal thing they sacri-

ficed is pride. Truth is, a rag picker in our society has no status. Digging some wasted food out of dumpsters and eating it is unthinkable to most of us. People who do such things are considered to be perverts, kooks, or both, with no standing at all. If you do decide to engage in this sort of activity, be warned that you will generally be perceived as a desperate, deranged being, with no sense, no aesthetics, no class, and no sensibilities.

It's a heavy load to bear, but many find that it's worth it. At least from an economic standpoint, anyway.

Some people use the term "scrounging" as a polite reference to stealing. I do not intend to imply or even remotely suggest that scrounging and stealing are one in the same. The scrounger is simply salvaging items—in this case food—that for some reason have been thrown away by the owner as refuse.

Scrounging could also be taken to mean gleaning farmers' fields for leftover agricultural products. Certainly this is a vaild use of the word scrounging, but not a meaning I want to use for the purposes of this book. Since dealing with food producers and processors requires a different set of skills, I have arbitrarily separated these activities into distinct chapters.

"Unfit" Supermarket Produce

One way of looking at scrounging is to consider it as an activity that one performs in cities and towns, as opposed to agricultural and industrial areas. It's an end-users' game, related to making use of processed food items at the end of the chain that are otherwise considered "unfit" for human consumption. Normally this "unfitness" designation is assigned for aesthetic reasons rather than because of health considerations.

The best sources for "unfit" foods are supermarkets.

There are varying estimates as to how much food is actually thrown out by supermarkets in the course of their normal daily operations. Supermarket waste fluctuates according to the time of year, the type of food, the type of store, the location of the store, and the local and national economic situations. Generally, the wastage rate ranges from about 0.5 percent for some canned goods up to as high as 25 percent for produce such as bananas, pears, lettuce, tomatoes, plums, peaches, and avocados.

As a general rule, the better the store and the better the neighborhood, the more picky the supermarket management will be about selling blemished and damaged food. Some awfully good-looking items have ended up in the rear dumpsters of supermarkets located in wealthy sections of town merely because a jar broke, soaking the labels off the surrounding goods, or because a veggie developed a few tiny brown spots.

Any product that has been blemished or damaged by careless handling is usually thrown out. This is firm policy for all of the chain supermarkets that I know of. Otherwise the hired-help might be tempted, or so management's reasoning goes, to intentionally damage items that they can then take home with them because they are unsaleable. A case of corn flakes, for instance, that has been hit by a forklift truck will be sorted and all packages that are broken will be dumped. There is nothing wrong with the corn flakes, but store policy dictates that they simply cannot be sold to the general public.

Part of the problem supermarkets have is legal. They must be responsible for the products they sell and, in that regard, guarantee that they will not make the customers ill or do something harmful that they are not supposed to do. This liability factor forces the supermarkets to be very cautious about the condition

in which they deliver their goods. It also ensures that huge amounts of good edible items end up in dumpsters, much to the delight of the scrounger.

Few people have any idea how much food is sold through the average supermarket in the U.S. Some years back I worked for a smallish, 20,000-square-foot market that had four checkout lanes as well as an express lane. The store itself was part of a well-known national chain, and was in every regard just a plain, old, everyday, average supermarket where plain, old, average, everyday people did their grocery shopping.

One aspect of my job that amazed me was the volume the store did. Adjusted to 1982 dollars, they were selling about $12,500 worth of goods a day. That works out to $85,000 per week or $4.5 million a year! About 35 percent of this dollar volume was from the sale of meat and dairy products, 25 percent from produce, 15 percent from canned and boxed goods, 10 percent from notions and personal health care, 10 percent from hardware, and 5 percent from bakery sales. This was before the days when supermarkets actively promoted extensive lines of appliances and hardware.

My main point here is that cheap eaters will be astounded at the volume of supermarket goods that end up in the dumpster even at a well-run, small store. Let's assume we are talking about a store in a lower middle-class shopping center where management can allow the produce to be a little less bright, where a few more dented cans are put on the rack or in a special markdown basket, and where the meat will still sell at a discount if it has become a bit grey.

Based on my experience, the following figures may be somewhat conservative. Let's start by throwing away 8 percent of the meat supply as trimmings, damaged, or out of condition. In one week this amounts to $2,450

worth of food in the garbage. A low figure for produce is 15 percent waste, or $3,281 per week. Canned and boxed goods are in the long run damaged and destroyed to the extent of about .05 percent a year, or $65 worth per week. The bakery throws out 15 percent, or $656 worth. Hardware is insignificant at .3 percent waste, or $26 worth per week.

Because the cost of this waste is figured into the cost of the goods when the retail price is established, the above figures are not strictly accurate. However, they give the reader some relative idea as to the magnitude of waste we incur running our society as we do. No wonder we Americans are referred to as a throw-away society!

The Matter of Timing

The scrounger's problem now becomes a matter of timing. Finding the best time during which to scrounge through the supermarket dumpsters to retrieve all of this bounty takes some thought and work.

Many supermarkets stay open virtually around the clock nowadays, and the produce is stocked in the morning. Most shelf items are stocked at night, and the meats are only worked on a regular eight-to-five shift during the day. Goods damaged in the receiving room are sorted and dumped at all times of the day as they arrive by truck. Generally truck shipments come only during traditional daytime working hours.

The other important time to know is when the garbage pickup usually occurs. Often the trucks start their pickups at the commercial establishments very early in the morning and make from two-to-five pickups a week at a given market.

Most successful supermarket scroungers work their routes late in the evening till early morning. However, it is better to check the dumpsters often during the day

if that is possible. Some supermarket managers go out of their ways to keep scroungers away from their back alleys. But if possible, check often during the day or good items may be buried and become difficult to retrieve.

Oddly enough, the better the neighborhood, the more readily the discreet scroungers will be received. Apparently supermarket managers in the seedier parts of town get tired of scroungers. In the better sections, scroungers tend to be viewed with pity and allowed to ply their trade, providing they don't become pests, make a mess, or embarrass the customers by their presence. It is even possible to develop a sort of working relationship with supermarket managers, who may begin to take a charitable view toward your scrounging. In the inner city, however, the competition can be fierce. Occasionally there is even fighting among the winos who are looking through the dumpsters.

Some items in a supermarket are too old to sell, but are not thrown out. Examples are bread from an independent bakery and milk. Both are removed by the deliverymen and taken back to the processor, if they are not sold in the prescribed time. Scroungers can sometimes do well by visiting the dumpsters of these establishments. But don't be surprised if there is nothing to scrounge. A lot of bakeries and dairies sell their unsaleable products for use as animal feed. Buying this stuff is usually out of the question because of the large volumes involved.

Sometimes supermarkets will sell out-of-date products such as packaged fish, pork, beef, and bones for dog food. The scrounger can ask the head butcher to buy these items, being sure to stress that they are for his dog and *not* for him. Similarly, dated dairy and bakery products that bear the store label can occa-

sionally be had for very low prices. They aren't as cheap as rescuing them from the garbage, but the process is much easier on most people's pride.

Dumpsters "á la Carte"

Another good place to look for a meal is in the dumpsters of certain restaurants. The two best types of places to look are at the fast food chains and behind the uptown, expensive restaurants. In-between places seem to attract a clientele who consume most of what is on their plates.

Fast food chains dump an incredible amount of food that has grown cold on the shelf or become dated. They also trash burgers, etcetera, that have been dropped or otherwise dirtied. Generally they dump very little that has not had some degree of preparation.

This is not true of the better restaurants. Some throw out as much as 5 percent or more of their fancy steaks, seafood, and produce because the food has aged beyond aesthetic use in their coolers or freezers. People tend to think of restaurant waste as being the leftovers on someone's plate. This occurs, of course, but is by no means the only food that is dumped.

Almost all restaurants close up sometime. After hours the scrounger can pretty well take his own sweet time going through the dumpster. On the other hand, most out-of-date foods taken out of coolers (as opposed to food left on the plate) are dumped by the morning crew when they come on at ten to start the day's food preparation. By evening, these reasonably good items may be buried under a ton of half-eaten spuds and congealed brown gravy.

Other productive—though more mundane—trash cans to examine are those behind institutions where lots of

people are fed. Examples are hospitals, schools, and dormitories. Both table residue and preparation throwaways will be available. Also, some larger cities have food assembly plants that generate waste. These are the plants that produce prefabricated pizzas, airline dinners, TV dinners, egg rolls or whatever. Look into these places. The quality of some of the slightly damaged packages that are commonly dumped will shock you.

Airline Food

Supermarkets and restaurants notwithstanding, the best place in the world to scrounge is through airline trash that is generated from serving inflight meals. The waste that is generated and then concentrated into a few dumpsters is truly appalling.

The recommended approach requires going through the trash before it is sent through the sorting lines where the plates, glasses, and silver, if any, are removed. Don't be surprised when you find whole dinners still safely sealed in plastic containers, and piles of individually wrapped crackers, rolls, cookies, and much more. Many times entire lunches or snacks served in sturdy boxes that haven't even been opened will be dumped! After the trash is sorted, it becomes more difficult, but there is still a ton of food available sealed away in plastic bags that keep it from becoming contaminated.

I suppose most people view airline food as being substandard fare, or perhaps turning up their noses to it is the chic thing to do now. But we know that hungry people change their attitudes real quick, so this idea is well worth exploring.

Beware the Bureaucrat!

One of the greatest worries that the city scrounger has is that some do-gooder bureaucrat will feel sorry for

him and try to sign him up for some sort of government giveaway program. Giving up one's freedom is an individual decision, but the temptation will be there for some of you.

Just remember that after you get on to it, the safe food items in a dumpster are easily recognized. Sure, maybe you'll have to cook some of it extra well, or spend more time cleaning it up, but the food *can* be made safe and nutritious. A government bureaucrat with a program to help you can, on the other hand, be a nagging tyrant whose very presence constitutes a far greater threat to your future than food scrounged from a dumpster could ever be.

Scrounging is a profitable pastime which is made possible by our persnickety eating habits and our country's extreme affluence. If nothing else, you will be amazed at all of the good food you can find out there, if you only try.

7. EASY PICKIN'S

Go to any bookstore and you can find literally dozens of books on the subject of foraging for wild edibles. My readers know that I'm a meat-eater first and foremost. I believe that meat is the best source for nourishment on a day-to-day basis, particularly in survival situations. But I also like my veggies as much as the next fellow, and of course have my favorites. In this chapter I will discuss those wild plants which are not only abundant, nutritious, and easy-to-find, but also taste good.

This last quality is most important to me, since many of the generic stalking-the-wild-milkweed-type books recommend eating certain wild plants that honestly taste like hell. So be assured all the plants that I suggest you seek will be palatable.

Cheap eaters who live in the city should read this chapter even if they don't think it pertains to them. In fact, there are a lot of good wild edibles growing even in urban core areas. I remember a couple of months back, I went to Washington D.C. to check out a potential foreign assignment. The airline I took deplaned at National Airport, which is right across the Potomac from D.C. and only about three miles from downtown. On my cab ride into town, I made it a point to count as many beds of cattails along the river banks as I could. Remember,

we are talking about a big congested city with lots of people.

My figures are general, but I would estimate that I saw no less than thirty acres of cattails along the Potomac just before the bridge entering the city. That does not include the other thousands of acres lying along the river that I could not or did not see but know must be there.

Starting with Cattails

Cattails are one of the most commonly available, good tasting, wild vegetables found in the United States. Yet so few people take advantage of them as a food source, it is shocking. Cattails reproduce rapidly so they are abundant. Virtually the entire plant is edible, and the yields per acre are quite good. In short, every cheap eater should be aware of cattails.

The best time to gather cattails is in the winter. At that time the roots have completed a storage cycle and contain an incredible 45 percent starch and 10 percent sugar! Few other plants—either wild or domestic—provide such a big, energy-packed meal.

To prepare the roots, peel off the outer covering and boil, broil, stew, or grate and make into cakes. In spring and summer the young shoots can be collected and, after peeling, lightly boiled like asparagus. Even the cattail flower has food value. Late in spring when the plant is pollinating, the pollen can be collected and cooked into a gruel. The porridge that results is extremely nutritious.

The Mighty Acorn

Another favorite wild edible of mine found in great quantities all over the U.S. is the acorn. Some variety of oak grows virtually anyplace you look all over the U.S.

But because a few varieties of acorns are poisonous in their untreated state, people do not generally use them. This is unfortunate, since the mighty acorn is surely North America's most common nut.

Enough acorn meal to last a family of four for a year can usually be gathered and prepared by one person in three or four days. Start by collecting the acorns in large sacks. Take them home and dry them for about ten days. Don't let them dry for too long or worms will develop that will eat the acorn meat out of the shell.

Place the nuts one deep on a firm, smooth surface and use a three-foot length of two-by-four to break the shells. Pick the meats out of the shells and throw them into a pail of water. You might want to taste a nut or two to determine how much tannic acid has to be removed. The more bitter the taste, the more acid must be dissolved off.

Happily, tannic acid is highly soluble in water. Most acorns can be washed by putting the cracked meats in a tub of water for two hours, and then in a fresh wash for another twenty-four hours. If the meats are still bitter, you may conclude that they are a very acidic variety and that you will have to boil them. Do this over a gentle fire for two hours. At the end of this time, strain the nuts away from the wash water while it is still warm.

The resulting acorn meal can be ground and lightly roasted to dry, or mixed with water and baked into hard cakes. The cakes keep well without much fooling around and, like cattail roots, are good tasting.

Walnuts

Walnuts are not as common as acorns, but are still fairly abundant over about one-third of the U.S. They are larger than acorns but tougher to prepare. Like acorns, the best approach calls for waiting till they are

lying thick on the ground below the tree, and then sorting the nice big ones into a gunny sack.

Allow them to dry for about two weeks till the outer green hulls start to wrinkle and crack. If this is done properly at the correct time, the skin will peel off pretty easily by hand. I prefer to crack wild walnuts with a hammer.

Some walnuts have meat so bitter that they must be washed and made into meal in a procedure similar to how you prepare acorns.

There may be others, but the only other wild nuts I have found in sufficient quantities to make it worthwhile are hazel and hickory nuts. Both can be eaten without soaking, but are small when found in the wild and tough to get out of the shell.

More Recommended Wild Edibles

Shortly before he passed away some years ago, my father became enamored with the "good old days" he'd spent growing up in Germany before the turn of the century. One of the last things he did was to send back to the old country for a package of hybrid dandelion seed. He'd enjoyed eating dandelion greens back when he was a kid and wanted to try the "really tasty kind" again, he said.

Although they are often stunted and little, dandelions can be found just about any place in the U.S. Early in the year the young leaves are eaten fresh like lettuce or spinach. Later, the greens get bitter and must be boiled. The boiled greens are ideal freezer stock.

Just using dandelions, acorns, and cattails alone, there is no reason for anyone in this country to spend the first cent for store-bought vegetables. There are also a lot

more free sources for veggies to look for. Some are totally wild, and at least one vegetable is known to most gardeners—asparagus.

Most every reader is familiar with asparagus. It grows wild in a wide band of country through the center of the U.S. Cut it early in the spring before the stalks get tough and stringy. Then boil and eat. The remainder should be frozen.

Another equally common vegetable is the fern. When they are young, people refer to them as fiddleheads and eat ferns as a gourmet food. As far as I know, all ferns are nonpoisonous. But as a practical matter, only the young ones are edible. Break the young, six-to-eight inch stalks off at the ground and rub away the external coating of fuzz. Wash and then boil for forty-five minutes to an hour. Young ferns are quite good. Older ferns have sticky stringy sap that stews into a stringy mess when cooked. I'll eat the stuff but not before looking around a bit more for something else first.

So far, all of the wild plants I have suggested occur mostly in well-watered pine, hardwood, or grassland environments of our country. For people living in the southwest U.S. amongst scrub desert, there is always the lowly prickly pear. If you aren't sure that the flat leaf cactus you are seeing along the road is actually prickly pear, cut a leaf open and check the juice. If it is milky, it *isn't* a prickly pear and should *not* be eaten.

Prickly pear fruit is very tasty. It is watery and even a bit sweet. Nutritionally, I am told, it is excellent. To eat the leaves, shave away the spines and cut into French-fry type pieces. These pieces can be eaten raw, boiled, in stew, or whatever. You will again be amazed at how good-tasting they are. This plant is abundant

wherever it is able to grow, and should be a mainstay of the desert cheap eater's diet.

Some flower bulbs are edible. Camas roots, for instance, are starchy and full of energy. Boiled, they taste like a potato with the consistency of an onion. However, if you don't know your flowers and wild plants, don't eat them. Flowers are like mushrooms. Some are good for you, and some are bad for you. Some are highly toxic. And it is next to impossible to learn how to tell the difference from reading a book, in my opinion.

One wild flower that is reasonably safe to eat, since most people know it on sight, is the wild rose. Eat the berry or "hip" after peeling off the outer layer of skin. Eating some dried rose hips each day throughout the winter will prevent scurvy because of the high vitamin C content.

Rather than going on and on till this became a roots-and-berries book, I will list one more good edible plant that is universally available throughout the U.S. and then let it go at that. Certainly my point about wild edibles will then be clear to you.

The stalks and seeds of the common water lily are extremely nutritious and abundant enough so that no one ever need go hungry or spend his last dollar for food. There is more food value in the plant in fall, but in a pinch water lilies can be gathered any time. That is something you *cannot* say for wheat, corn, peas, lentils or many other domestic crops.

The seeds taken from the pods are quite small and can be hard to handle. I pick the seed pods, dry them thoroughly, and crush them with a rock or board on a hard smooth surface. Winnow the chaff as much as possible and then wash the seeds out into a cheese cloth fil-

ter. Dry the seeds and then grind lightly before eating.

Or collect the water lily stalks and cut them into six-inch pieces. Lightly peel as though you were getting a carrot ready to eat. Some lilies are strong and must be leached like acorns to remove the bitter taste, but usually this is not the case.

Cook up the peeled soaked chunks into a gruel. If it is handled correctly, the stuff tastes much like pablum with a dash of vinegar in it.

Wild Sweeteners

Two other wild items deserve a mention, although they are not vegetables.

The first is wild honey taken from a bees' nest in an old garage wall, hollow tree, or hole in the ground. It is surprising to note how many of these colonies there are around today. If you are not comfortable around bees, get a book and check into it. A hundred pounds of honey is easy to come by and will replace a lot of expensive, store-bought sweetener.

The other item is maple syrup. If you live in a place where there are maple trees, you might consider making some syrup. However, you may be better advised to sell your production and use the money to buy food. Maple syrup is very valuable compared to when I was young, when we sucked it up like sugar water.

I give full details on how to collect wild honey and maple syrup in my book, *Live Off the Land in the City and Country*, which is also available from Paladin Press. Get a copy if you want to learn more about collecting these goodies for free.

Looking for semiwild vegetables can be fun. This group of edibles comprises the last category of items that will help keep you out of the supermarket and the poorhouse.

8. RAISING A GARDEN

As long as I am on the subject of plants and vegetables, it seems like a good time to talk about gardens. Again, you can find lots of in-depth books on gardening at the bookstore. All I plan on doing in this chapter is talking about my own philosophy of raising a garden, plus giving you some general information that will help improve your yields and make the garden work a little easier than it is generally thought to be.

An African Lesson

This whole business of learning how to raise a good garden the smart way reminds me of the year I spent in East Africa. For a third of that time, I ran the afternoon medical detail and treated literally thousands of people. The rest of my stay there was spent hauling food to the starving (there were lots of these), fighting off bush raiders, flying people in and out of hospitals in Kuala Lumpur and Nairobi—and, oh yes, teaching the poor natives the fundamentals of gardening.

I'm sure that many of you could have done the same thing, but honestly, I saved dozens of natives' lives during that year. Yet did I really help them? In my heart, I know that every native whose life I saved is now dead, in all probability.

Yet I did leave something that people still have, I

think, and that is still saving lives. I am talking about the fundamental gardening techniques I taught there. I showed people that by planting corn in rows in the manure-rich old kraal sites, and then by weeding and watering the plot a bit, they could increase their yields up to ten times!

The various tribes I taught these simple ideas to were amazed and talked about nothing else for months. They consequently treated me sort of like a demigod. It was truly humbling. Anyway, I am positive that even today the gardening methods I taught these people are helping them to eat better, and are therefore saving lives—especially of the youngsters.

The Cheap Eater's Garden

This book is not meant to be a how-to treatise on gardening, as I mentioned earlier. For one, it isn't long enough and, number two, just because I have done something for fifty years doesn't necessarily make me an expert. Many times I wonder if what I really have is one year of experience fifty times over, and not the other way around. Every year brings a new set of different conditions and challenges. No one ever really learns everything about how to raise a garden, and good gardeners never stop learning.

Certainly, there is no question that the cheap eater is going to have to use gardening as one of his main food sources. Even if you live in the middle of the city, you must at least try to work out a method of raising some vegetables. I have a friend who lives in the center of Denver in a condo. She manages to raise a few red beets, carrots, and radishes in the flower beds and along the freeway at a hilly interchange. Another city dweller comes to mind who grows lettuce in a flower box on the fourth floor of his apartment complex. And then there

is the young professional woman who wheels tomatoes in and out on her deck during the warm days, and she lives in downtown Helena, Montana.

An idea that is working for some people is to raise vegetables indoors rather than decorative green plants. The concept really works *if* you take the time to experiment a bit and figure out what will grow best. Under normal circumstances, some garden plants can't possibly get enough sunlight inside to produce a crop.

Inside or out, the trickiest part of gardening is finding out what usually grows best in a given area. I say usually, because some years' conditions are just wrong and the cutworms get the crop, the blossoms freeze off, or the nights are too cold. No matter how successful the crop was in the past, it just won't grow some years in some places.

On the positive side, there are lots of vegetables that almost always produce abundantly, no matter where the cheap eater puts them in the ground in the continental United States. All require attention to detail, lots of hard work, and a sympathetic understanding of how and why things grow. A few require special skills. My brother, as an example, who lives in a cold and inhospitable place in Canada, manages to raise produce including tomatoes by planting his garden on a terrace looking south over a lake. The long days and the abundant sunlight reflected from the water make up for the short growing season in his region.

Crop Selection

To start with, kale, spinach, turnips, radishes, lettuce, peas, and broccoli are all good bets for colder climates. They will even grow in places as far north as Montana, northern Idaho, Washington, North Dakota, Wisconsin,

Minnesota, New Hampshire, Vermont, upper New York State, and Maine. In the southern third of these states, gardeners can also grow crops of zucchini, green beans, Chinese peas, potatoes, red beets, carrots, and some winter squash.

Corn, tomatoes, squash, some melons, and the like will grow from the middle states southward, although in the deep south such things as peas and spinach must be planted in fall as a winter crop.

Winter crops are a real bonus for the cheap eater who lives in a place where they work. Spinach, peas, lettuce, red beets, and carrots can be started in November, March, and again in late September, providing vegetables all year round. The up side of this plan is that very little food processing storage is necessary. The down side is that the disease and insect buildups are often severe. Gardeners minimize this problem by rotating the various crops around the garden and by wise use of insecticides.

This two crop system works to an extent even in the more northerly zones. Lettuce, peas, and radishes, for instance, work nicely as early spring or late fall crops.

As is true with everything green, some of it will grow some places and some of it won't, no matter what you do. I remember living in Idaho in the late 1960s in a place where it was impossible to raise potatoes! To a certain extent, the cheap eater can mitigate this problem by carefully selecting appropriate varieties. This can be done by going to a garden store on the outskirts of town early in the season during a slack time of the day. Look for a place run by an ex-farmer and his wife if possible. These folks can provide more information about what grows and what doesn't grow in your area in thirty minutes than you can get in five hours from a big city nursery.

Supplies

Ten dollars worth of seed and 3 six-dollar bags of fertilizer are enough to produce all the vegetables we need for an entire year. Our garden measures about seventy-five by forty feet, but we do waste some space and, other than lettuce, seldom double crop. Double cropping is an option for those who want to intensify the rate of production on limited ground area, as well as a year-round crop plan for people living in the South.

Fertilizer should cost about $250 to $300 per ton. That's what farmers pay for it, but many times the flashy garden stores will ask $1,000 per ton or more from gardeners and homeowners. Ask around a bit at the various farm stores before you buy. The difference in price will amaze you.

Nitrogen is the most expensive element in fertilizer. Phosphate is second, and potash third. These elements are designated by numbers, such as 5-10-5 or 12-12-12, meaning they have 12 percent nitrogen, 12 percent phosphate, and 12 percent muriate of potash. I do not fool around with manure, compost piles, and other such funky organic gardening techniques. The end result, in my opinion, is the same and I have too much other work to do without piddling around pulling weeds, hauling leaves and litter, and fighting insects by hand. Gardening for the cheap eater is a necessity and not a hobby. This fact assumes and necessitates a goodly amount of professionalism and efficiency.

Perhaps it goes without saying, but stay away from growing the crops you can glean from commercial operations in your area. This may seem to preclude raising everything that grows well in your area. In practice, it usually does not. Just the few items that grow exceptionally well.

Also be sure to raise vegetables you can store without too much trouble. If you can't freeze it, don't raise summer squash, such as zucchini, in any quantity. Instead, raise winter squash like the acorn variety that will keep in a cellar.

Tips and Techniques

I try to turn over my garden once in late fall before the rains start. This helps kill a tremendous bunch of weeds. Then in spring, I dig or rototill again shortly before I plant. Since planting occurs at approximately two-week intervals for about two months, I am always in the process of tearing up a bit more of the garden.

I rotate crops, putting corn one place one year and carrots the next. Perhaps the yield *is* boosted but, as I pointed out before, the weeds and insects are definitely easier to handle.

Tiny little seeds, such as carrots, require a finer, shallower row for planting. No matter what you raise, the garden as a whole will benefit mightily from having deep, well-worked soil.

The best bet if you're starting from scratch with no previous experience, is to go to the bookstore and purchase a general text on gardening that has the scores of vegetable varieties listed with individual recommendations for each. Then start in practicing on a small scale. Some people never can develop a green thumb, but for most it is possible.

Apparently more and more people are raising gardens. The trend is up about 4 percent a year after a slow decline spanning the last twenty years. Perhaps someday soon we will see front-yard gardens in suburbia rather than grass and ornamental shrubs. The conditions would be ideal.

Currently the average annual value of all homegrown fruits and vegetables produced in the U.S. is about $15 billion. This amount is more than 11 percent of the total food bill Americans pay. The average garden is 770 square feet, according to the Department of Agriculture, and about 32 million households have gardens.

Fruits and Berries

Berries and fruits are not garden vegetables, yet if space permits, they should be considered. Raspberries grow well over much of the U.S. Sixteen stands are normally considered to be enough to provide berries for a year for a family of four. Other berries like strawberries and blueberries should also be considered. Sets can often be had for very little money by asking a neighbor or friend for a start.

Fruit trees are initially a bit expensive. Again, if a place to raise them is available, they are a good bet. Just be certain what you plant will produce a reasonable crop in your latitude and will mature in your lifetime. Ask other gardeners or at a nursery you trust.

For the last fifty years, I have lived dozens of places in the U.S. as well as overseas in the Near East, Far East, Africa, Asia, Europe, and Central America. Sometimes we were in pretty remote, desolate areas. But I never really worried about my situation if I could grow a garden. As the old farmer always said, "People with big gardens always have something to eat."

9. WILD AND SEMIWILD GAME

Here is the chapter where I am going to lose the purists. Be warned that if the idea of chowing down on dogs, cats, rats, and carp revolts you, then you should probably skip this chapter. I can imagine the horror some of you will feel when you read about eating "pets." And you thought this book was about cutting your food bill!

Let's face it: culture and aesthetics have to be put aside, if you are going to eat for next to nothing. Every last source of food that is healthful and nourishing must be put to use. This may include critters that look fluffy and cute to you now. But be assured that they will look tasty and filling, once you get hungry enough.

As I mentioned in the first chapter, that group of Vietnamese refugees were getting along rather famously (and cheaply, of course) on a diet of snared-and-trapped pets. It was natural for these folks to use this food source, since nothing in their culture stigmatized it as uncivilized. Not so with us Americans.

Do not underestimate the controversy provoked by these Vietnamese pet-eaters. Americans were horrified with the idea of these inscrutible Orientals eating their Lassies and Morrises, even if they were neglected unwanted strays. Sure, Americans will scarf up cows (a sacrilege to the cow-worshipping Hindus), pigs (the Mos-

lems think they're a cross between a dog and a rat), and fish (certain American Indian tribes would starve to death before eating fish). But offer them a plate of steaming dog or cat meat, and you'll be lucky to make it out of there alive! I guess it just goes to show that one man's entree is another man's beloved companion.

The Taste Test

My parents talked about the fact that they ate cats and dogs in Germany and Russia toward the end of the First World War. Similarly, my cousins who remained in Germany are very up front about the fact that they ate ex-pets during the reconstruction after World War II. In both cases, my relatives were so hungry and the food was so welcome that even to this day they speak of the experience very casually without embarrassment or regret.

I personally have eaten dog three periods in my life: the period when I was in Africa, again in the Philippines, and rather extensively the year I was in Alaska. In addition, my daughter has prepared dog on several occasions recently while testing the recipes found at the end of this book. I can honestly and truthfully report that I have eaten far worse animals in terms of taste, texture, and greasiness.

My consumption of cat has been mostly limited to barbecuing the backstraps and saddles from bobcats and cougar. The meat from felines this large is white, much like pork or veal. As with dog and just about any other mammal, the older animals can be extremely tough and gamy.

Smaller house cats also have light meat, which generally tastes fairly mild. The only exceptions are the old tomcats. Even at their worst, these can be quite edible. At least compared to paying two dollars per pound for beef, they are edible.

Pets and Pounds

The easiest place to get dogs and cats is from the local pound, obviously (remember what I said about skipping this chapter . . .). Just be careful that you keep your real intentions regarding these critters to yourself. For some strange reason that I absolutely cannot understand, it is *verboten* to pick up cats and dogs to eat. Yet it is OK for the pound to give these same animals a lethal injection, destroying any value they might have had.

In a larger city, cheap eaters can go around to the pound three or four times a year and pick up a couple of dogs and as many as four cats. It is often best, however, to have different members of the family go in separately at different times so that you can hopefully avoid any hassles with the animal caretakers. Be careful about this. The scorn and derision that will be heaped on you if you are found out will be mind-blowing. Some cities even have laws prohibiting the eating of dogs and cats.

In smaller towns where there are no pounds, or in places where it is no longer possible to use that source, the cheap eater can make good use of newspaper ads listing free pets in need of a home. Be double-damn sure you don't give addresses or telephone numbers where you can be found. Previous owners sometimes decide that it would be nice to pay a visit to their former pets. If the animal isn't there, you may have a bunch of explaining to do. Have a story ready, just in case.

Small towns pose a problem to the dog/cat eater over the long haul. Your neighbors will eventually suspect what you are doing and conclude that you are worse than Idi Amin! In this case the most effective measure is to secretly trap stray cats and dogs, avoiding the pound route altogether.

Trapping Strays

Initially, stray dogs are pretty dumb about either leg hold traps or snares. Once they have escaped a trap, though, they become extremely difficult to catch again. All cats—including wild, domestic, large, small, and even cougars—are never tough to trap. They will always stick their heads or feet in a trap, no matter how many times they have been burned before.

The fall of 1956, I trapped a two-mile ditch running through about 1,000 acres of Illinois farm ground lying perhaps twenty-five miles west of Chicago. My quarry was coons. Some of the property was still in corn and soybeans, but most of the area had been allowed to grow up into giant ragweeds, cane, and nettles. Besides coon, there appeared to be quite a few skunks, possums, weasels, mink, and foxes in the area.

By the end of the first day, I'd set about twenty-five traps. That night the weather turned sharply colder, presaging a cold trend that persisted for about two months, as I remember.

Next morning it was crisp and beautiful. I started very early, mostly because I was anxious to see what was waiting in the various sets along the line. This feeling of excitement early in the season is common among trappers. Much to my dismay and disgust, I started finding feral house cats in my traps. There were so many that almost all of my sets had trapped a cat, or had been thrown by a cat.

With increasing displeasure, I worked the whole trap line. By the last of the twenty-five traps, I had taken a total of eighteen house cats and only one lone, usable coon.

Next morning was a repeat of the first day. There were over twenty cats waiting for me and nothing else.

Eventually I figured that the cats were overabundant because people were bringing them out from the city and turning them loose. I suppose they thought they were doing the cats a favor. While the weather was warm, the poor things could subsist on song birds and mice. But as it grew colder, they began to starve to death and were suckers for my baited traps.

Since that time I have had the same thing happen with feral cats on a couple of different occasions. Let's face it: with quantities of meat available like this, no one need go hungry.

City cheap eaters are usually best off to trap dogs using a bit of meat as bait. Lure the pooch into a garage, under a porch, an outbuilding, or whatever. Once caught, they tend to yelp quite a bit. It is better to have them hollering out of sight where you can take care of them without making a big spectacle.

Those who don't have traps can make snares out of soft copper appliance wire from which they have removed the insulation. The object is to set a loop in a place where the dog or cat will push through and lasso itself. Regular steel traps are easier to use but expensive. If you are going to set the harder-to-use snares, you will have to start earlier and expect to experience more failures than successes for awhile. The learning curve for snares is fairly flat for quite a long period of time.

Squirrels

Another animal that is abundant in many cities is the common tree squirrel. Even one of these little guys can provide enough meat to sweeten the stew pot for a week, though there is less than a pound of meat left after the skin and entrails are removed.

Since there are so many places for squirrels to run—

up trees, across limbs, on roofs, fences, garages, porches, on window ledges, etcetera—they must either be baited into traps or shot with a small .22 rifle using CB or BB caps.

Baiting in squirrels can be a bit touchy. At times during the year, they will come in to a piece of dried bread or a handful of fresh nuts. Other times when the maple seeds and hickory nut crops are good, there is no way to get them in to a bait. In early spring, lettuce works well. During the fall and winter, try a dab of peanut butter. Traps should be covered with some grass or leaves, but elaborate set preparations are unnecessary.

I like to use a small ten-or twelve-strand copper wire snare set on a bait box or a number 1 steel trap for squirrels. Either one is very effective.

Most cities have so many squirrels that it is virtually impossible to decimate them by trapping, no matter how large your family or how ravenous they are.

Playing Pied Piper

Rats are the one animal found in abundance in every city in the world. They must be the most abundant single mammal on this entire globe.

Some of the cat-sized rats found in New York sewers notwithstanding, most rats are quite small. Dressed, they usually go about three to the pound.

Rat meat is dark and not particularly strong tasting. At least it does not taste as strong as I had first supposed it might before giving roast rat a try. Remember this, since I am probably one of the few people this side of China who will admit to having sampled rat.

Traps for rats should generally be the kind that catch lots of the critters at once. This is true, not only because of their small size, but also because rats are usually found in large packs. Try setting up a tip board arrange-

ment wherein the rats coming in to a bait are dumped into a steel barrel or a wire pen. I suggest experimenting around a bit with these type batch traps rather than using small steel traps or snares. Rats caught in a steel trap quickly fall victim to their buddies who will swoop in and cannibalize their helpless brethren before you can get back and collect dinner.

One-way doors on a box trap also work nicely. Rats are always hungry and greedy. They will work diligently to get at any sort of bait. Rotten meat is best. A few kernels of wheat or corn, soiled flour, sugar, tallow, a fresh piece of squirrel skin, or any similar bait will bring them in nicely.

Fish and Fowl

Another very good source for meat that is often abundant and easy to catch are pigeons. If you can find where they are roosting, sneak in with a powerful flashlight, and "jacklight" them at night. This paralyzes the birds, just as it does with deer. Often when we were kids, we could catch two or three gunny sacks full of pigeons in one night, by prowling the old coal sheds, under bridges and underpasses, and in abandoned buildings.

A bird with great food potential is the blackbird or grackle. It is estimated that there are over 200 million of these feathered fellows east of the Mississippi alone.

At times I have put together a bird flight trap or a small cross snare for them. The easiest, however, is a light piece of line tied to a number 12 hook and baited with a single piece of grain. Normally you can expect to get a bird or two per day through the summer and fall with a set up of this type.

As with squirrels, don't concern yourself with hurting the population of blackbirds in your area. They are so

prolific that in some places, they scare them into nets at night and gas the pests by the pickup truck load.

A very good source for fish meat to look for if you have some water around your home area are carp. Because of the small bones, they are tough to eat, unless you boil the hell out of them, but they are fairly nutritious and large enough to warrant going after. As with the other animals mentioned, carp are usually abundant in almost every body of water, border to border and sea to sea. If the water where the carp are found runs swift, cold, and clean, the carp flesh can taste pretty darn good. But if their home water is sluggish, muddy, and warm, carp meat can be vile stuff indeed.

There are two good ways to catch carp. Remember that when collecting any wild or semiwild animal for food, you must spend substantially less time and energy getting the job done than you receive back when you eat your catch. Simply stated, this means you cannot afford to go and spend all Sunday afternoon sitting on the banks of a reservoir in the hope that you will catch a fish or two for dinner.

A simple chicken-wire fish trap that will sit there patiently working like a champ till you come back in a week or so to check it can be built from either scrounged materials or from purchased chicken wire. Even if everything is bought from the hardware store, the cost is still well under twelve dollars. Fish traps look like large, four-foot-long, two-foot-in-diameter cylinders made of half-inch chicken wire with a funnel built into one end. The fish smells the bait in the trap and works around the device till it swims through the funnel cone into the trap. At that point it is securely caught. Fish are unable to find the small funnel opening out, and remain there for weeks on end if necessary till the trap is checked and cleaned out.

Although carp are the most abundant fish in many places, fish traps will catch just about anything that lives in the water and comes to bait. They are especially effective on turtles.

Carp like chicken guts, hog entrails, or some other such animal-based bait. Things like doughballs and cheese will work but are a bit expensive to use. They also disappear fairly rapidly. The idea is to use baits that last a long time so that you will only have to check the trap every week or two.

For those who feel a fish trap requires more planning and preparation than they can afford, I suggest set (or trot) lines. A set line is simply a fish line with multiple hooks tied at two-foot intervals that is placed in a likely spot in a river, pond, or lake and left for a week or so. It must be checked more frequently than fish traps, but still beats sitting on the bank with a pole. When I was younger, I helped set a line in Cass Lake in the state of Minnesota that had 1,200 number 2/0 hooks on it! It took two of us a whole day to check and bait, but the rewards were unbelievable. Sometimes the boat wouldn't hold all the fish. We used two-inch chunks of sucker for bait.

Other Urban Game

There are other types of semiwild animals running around many of our cities. The vast majority of the residents don't know they are there or even what the animals are, for that matter. Four come immediately to mind: possums, coons, nutria, and muskrats. All are easy to trap. Either the critters are dumb as in the case of possums, nutria, and muskrats, or they are hopelessly curious, as is the raccoon.

Possum and coons will rummage around in trash cans for food. People usually think that dogs were the cause of the mess, but astute cheap eaters can often discover

the tiny humanlike paw prints that give these guys away. Small steel traps, size 1½ or 2, should be set in the runs to and from the trash. A bait set using fish, peanut butter, or meat is sometimes effective. During the spring, summer, and fall, coons and possums are usually not hungry and won't come to a bait.

Nutria have become extremely abundant in the southern third of the U.S. They are nothing more than large, South American water rats that have adapted to conditions in North America. They weigh about twelve pounds, so there is lots of meat on them. The hide is covered with hair rather than fur, and is therefore worthless.

Both nutria and muskrat, which are much smaller but equally good eating, are caught by placing steel traps in the animals' runs along the banks and in the shallow water. As I said, these guys are not smart. They just come along and stick their foot in the trap. Virtually every farm boy trapper learns on muskrats.

There are other animals out there that no one is using. Cheap eaters must sensitize themselves to the various wild and semiwild game possibilities. Then, using common sense and initiative, they must work at it in order to provide themselves with meat to complete their cheap balanced diets.

By the way, if you want to learn how to make and use dozens of different types of traps and snares, get a copy of my book, *Survival Poaching*. It is over 250 pages long and is filled with diagrams, Indian tricks, and old-timer advice.

10. DO-IT-YOURSELF BUTCHERING

Cheap eaters will sometimes have access to quantities of meat that they will not be able to use if they don't have some basic knowledge of how to run a home butchering program. Simply put, that's my reason for including this chapter.

Maybe a neighbor will want to get rid of some unwanted pet rabbits or goats. There might be an opportunity to buy a cow, pig, or sheep carcass for cheap that must be cut up, or a farmer might have a deformed runt critter that you can have for the hauling. Even if you only contemplate running a modest trap line, the problem is always what to do when you get the animals home.

There used to be a time not so long ago when virtually every book about food had a section on slaughter techniques. As I remember, no one read these chapters because the information was common knowledge. Nowadays, most people are so far removed from the agriculture base which supports them that they fail to appreciate the need for this type of information. Many recipe books make no mention at all of butchering techniques. Even the old meat-cutting diagrams that every cookbook used to contain are now missing.

If the idea of butchering your own meat is repugnant to you, you will have to get past the problem of eating

only a relatively few kinds of meat. Perhaps hunger will do it, or more ideally, the knowledge that hunger will surely occur if you don't assume a more rational outlook on things.

Butchering Basics

For starters, let's say you have the live critter in hand. The first task is going to be finding a place to butcher it. Larger animals in the hog/sheep category are best handled if they are hung by the hind legs. A rope and tree, rafter in the basement, or hook in the carport all work nicely for this. It is far better if the work is undertaken over a cement floor if at all possible. If not, clean grass works almost as well. Chickens and ducks are also best plucked while hanging. Rabbits are usually hung to skin, so generally the advice holds. Find a place to string up the carcass, even if it has to be the bathtub in your apartment.

Dressing the Birds

I'll begin with our feathered friends: the birds. Poultry is killed either by chopping off the head or cutting the neck on the left side and around in front. It is best to allow the critter to flop around and generally bleed itself out. For that reason, most people like some open, grassy space on which to butcher the birds.

Immediately after the bird stops flopping, it should be dipped for a few minutes in scalding hot water. Use water at about 145 degrees for chickens and 165 degrees for ducks. Test the water temperature with a candy thermometer. Hold the fowl by the legs and swish it up and down in the water to get it well heated. Test it continually by trying to pluck a pinch of feathers from its breast. As soon as they pull out easily, remove the bird, hang it up, and pluck all the feathers. If you performed

the dipping operation correctly, the feathers will come out very quickly with little effort. If the skin pulls apart, you dipped it too long or in too hot water.

Ducks and geese have a lot of oil in their feathers and are tough to dip properly. Some people simply skin the birds by pulling off the skin with the feathers in small, irregular chunks. I put a cup of detergent in the dip water and save the skin to eat.

After the bird is plucked, the small hairs and tiny residual feathers should be singed off over an open flame. I use a camping stove for this job.

Cut the feet off at the body joint, and slice out a three-inch hole from between the legs into the body cavity. Reach in and pull the entrails out, up to and including the lungs that lie up under the backbone.

Ducks and geese have no crop. Most of the other birds you are likely to encounter, including wild birds, have a crop that must be removed. Cut in parallel to the neck, next to the breast. There you will find the crop, which looks like a sac filled with grain. Remove this along with the windpipe if it still remains, and discard.

Before throwing away the entrails, be sure to sort through them and retrieve the heart, liver, and gizzard. Remove the heart from its sac and sever at the top to remove the blood vessels. Carefully remove the green bile duct from the liver, being careful not to spill it on the meat—if you do, wash it off *immediately*. To remove the partly digested grain from inside the gizzard, either slit it through the meaty side portion and remove the interior sac whole, washing the remaining meat, or simply cut the meaty side sections off and discard the rest. The latter procedure is considerably more wasteful but expedient if time is pressing. Save these organs separately in cold water while you continue dressing other birds.

Birds are usually dressed out whole. But if they are big like turkeys, they can be cut into pieces. To do this, pull the bird into two halves by grasping it in the neck cavity and giving it a sharp tug. Cut the wings away from the breast, and remove the upper back. Cut the breast in half again. Cut the thighs from the lower back and sever the drumsticks from the thighs.

Butchering Smaller Mammals

Smaller mammals, such as rabbits, are killed by a sharp blow with a dull instrument behind the ears at the base of the skull. Immediately hang them by the hind legs and cut off the head. Allow the carcass to bleed for a few minutes.

Next make a circular cut above each foot. Cut down along the sides of the rear legs to the bunghole. With the front legs, join the cuts at the sternum.

Carefully slice, pull, and peel the skin away from the body, starting at the rear. The skin should come off in a tube right down over the front legs. Rabbit skins come off very easily. Once started, they virtually peel right off with little or no help from the knife.

Critters such as cats, dogs, coons, nutria, etcetera, that have useable pelts are skinned with the head on. The procedure is the same down to the front legs. After that, the skins must be pulled down with a fair degree of enthusiasm. Invariably, four cuts must be made in toward the skull at the eyes and at the ears. Knowing how and when to do this requires skill that only comes with practice.

Once skinned, a cut is made down from the anus to the rib cage along the center of the stomach. Be careful not to cut through the intestine. Remove all of the guts.

Sort out the liver and heart. In most animals they are reasonably good eating.

Cut off the head if you haven't already done so. That's all there is to it.

Most people like to cut even small mammals into pieces. This should be done with a reasonable degree of consistency, so they all cook the same. An example here would be to sever the front and back legs from the main carcass at the joints, cut the back in half, and remove the front section of the rib cage.

In some parts of the world, meat is sold by the chunk—not by the cut, in fact. My wife used to buy meat at the annex next to the covered bazaar when we lived in Istanbul. It really got to be a game to see what chunk of meat she could come home with.

They sold goat, sheep, and beef, but it was often of widely varying taste, texture, and quality. There was no consistency at all. They simply killed and skinned the animal and then hung it up for sale. Buyers were given a random chunk starting at the forequarters up through the round steaks till the meat was gone. The size of the chunk depended on the number of grams you requested.

By watching carefully, my wife was able to show up at the meat stall just about the time they came to the filet mignons. It was all of seven lira per kilo (that was many years ago now), even for the piece we thought was the most desirable.

To this day my wife still speaks a few words of Turkish, a skill I believed she developed solely to be able to bargain in the market for filet mignon. And psychologists try to tell me sex is the single, strongest, motivating force. But even greater than hunger? I don't think so.

Butchering Large Animals

Large animals like cows, deer, and goats call for a different slaughtering approach. Wild game like deer and elk should be gutted in the field where they were

bagged. It is OK to bring them back home for skinning, if this is more convenient. In all cases, in spite of all else, the animal must be skinned and gutted as quickly as possible after it is dead. If the animal is killed at the place where it will be dressed, skin it before gutting it. The best, most humane way to slaughter large mammals like cows is to shoot them between the eyes with a .22 long rifle round.

The animal carcass should be hung after it is dead. This can be tough with heavy ones. Make sure that your meat hook, branch, or beam is stout enough to handle the load, and that you have enough help around to hoist up the animal into the air.

As I mentioned, with the exception of big game which should be field dressed, larger animals should be skinned before they are butchered. Remember that when skinning smaller animals, we rolled the skin off in a sort of tubelike fashion. It came off easily. Such is not the case with larger critters. Getting the skin off a sheep or cow is hard work. It has to be pulled and cut away from the flesh almost every inch of the way.

The skinning process for larger animals is started by removing the head from the very end of the neck. Circular cuts are then made around the legs just above the feet. Next a front center cut is made through the hide only (do not cut the belly muscle yet) from the end of the neck to the anus. Slit the hide down the inside of the legs until these cuts meet the central belly cut.

Now starting from the center, the skin must be pulled away to the sides and separated a little at a time from the body tissue with the aid of a sharp skinning knife. Often the novice will not know what he's doing here, but in this case, there is nothing like doing to learn.

After the carcass has been properly skinned, the butchering process can start. Begin by slitting the belly

open from the anus to the ribs. Be careful not to cut into the intestines or any other organs. Allow the entrails to fall out. Cut them off right above the stomach next to the liver. Slice around the diaphragm, remove, and save this for grinding into hamburger meat.

Next use a saw if necessary, to cut through the sternum where the ribs connect to each other in front. This cut should go down through the neck area. Pull out the heart, lungs, and other viscera, along with the trachea. All blood should be quickly washed out of the heart.

Quick and Easy Butchering

Through the years, I have developed a speedy method of butchering the meat into practical cuts. The end result is not quite the same as you would find in a butcher shop, but our motives are different. The commercial butcher wants to hide the largest bone in the smallest amount of meat. I want to bone out the meat in the quickest, easiest manner possible and save as much room in my freezer as I can.

To help a bit, we have included a diagram that corresponds with the eight steps that follow:

1. Using any wood saw—even a dull one—cut the carcass down the middle of the backbone into two halves.
2. Cut off the two front leg shanks at the last joint.
3. Cut the front hams off, taking as much meat with them off the rib cage as you can manage.
4. Saw the neck off where it joins the back bone.
5. Starting at the top, saw down through the ribs. Depending on size, the cuts start one-to-four inches from the back bone. The ribs may be cut into sec-

tions and broken in half again with an ax if necessary.

6. Remove the small pickle-shaped piece of meat lying next to the backbone under the ribs. This is the filet mignon.
7. Cut the loin strips out in two sections. The loins are the strips of muscle that protect the back bone.
8. Saw through the rear shank, separating the rear hams.

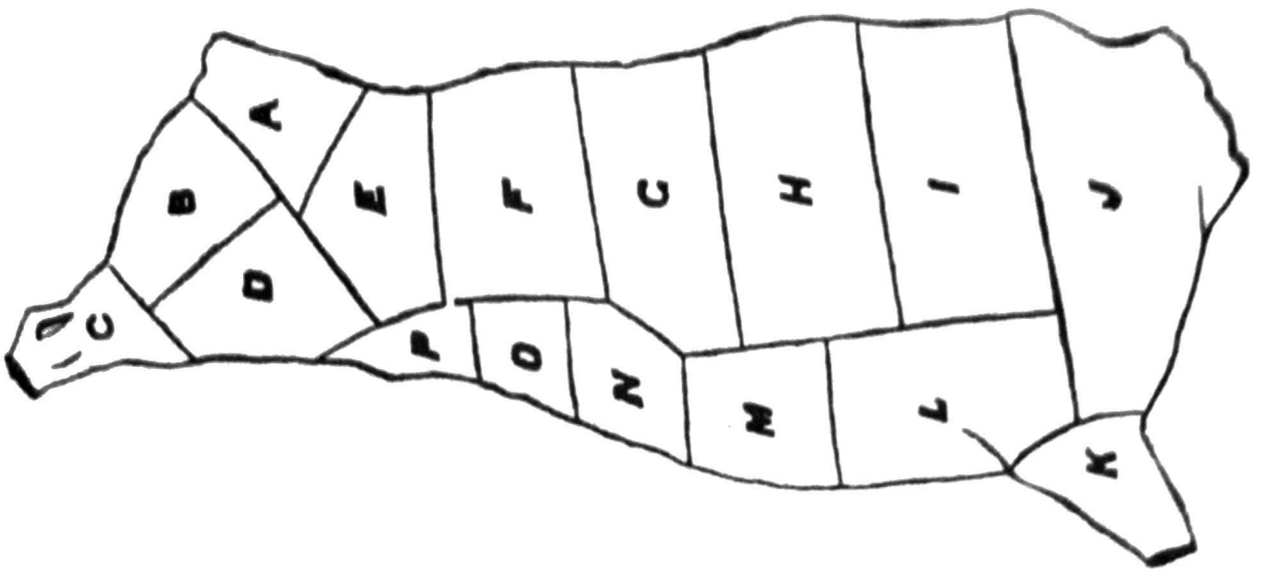
After that, if you want to, you can use a fillet knife bone out the large chunks that make up the top rounds or hams.

All game must be chilled quickly after the animal is slaughtered. In summer it must be sawed into chunks, boned if need be, and frozen immediately. In winter it is wise to leave the halved carcass "on the rail" overnight in a cold garage or shed. The cool meat cuts easier and won't overwork the freezer.

If the weather promises to be in the 40s for a week, I will age beef. Aged goat and sheep meat doesn't taste very good, in my opinion.

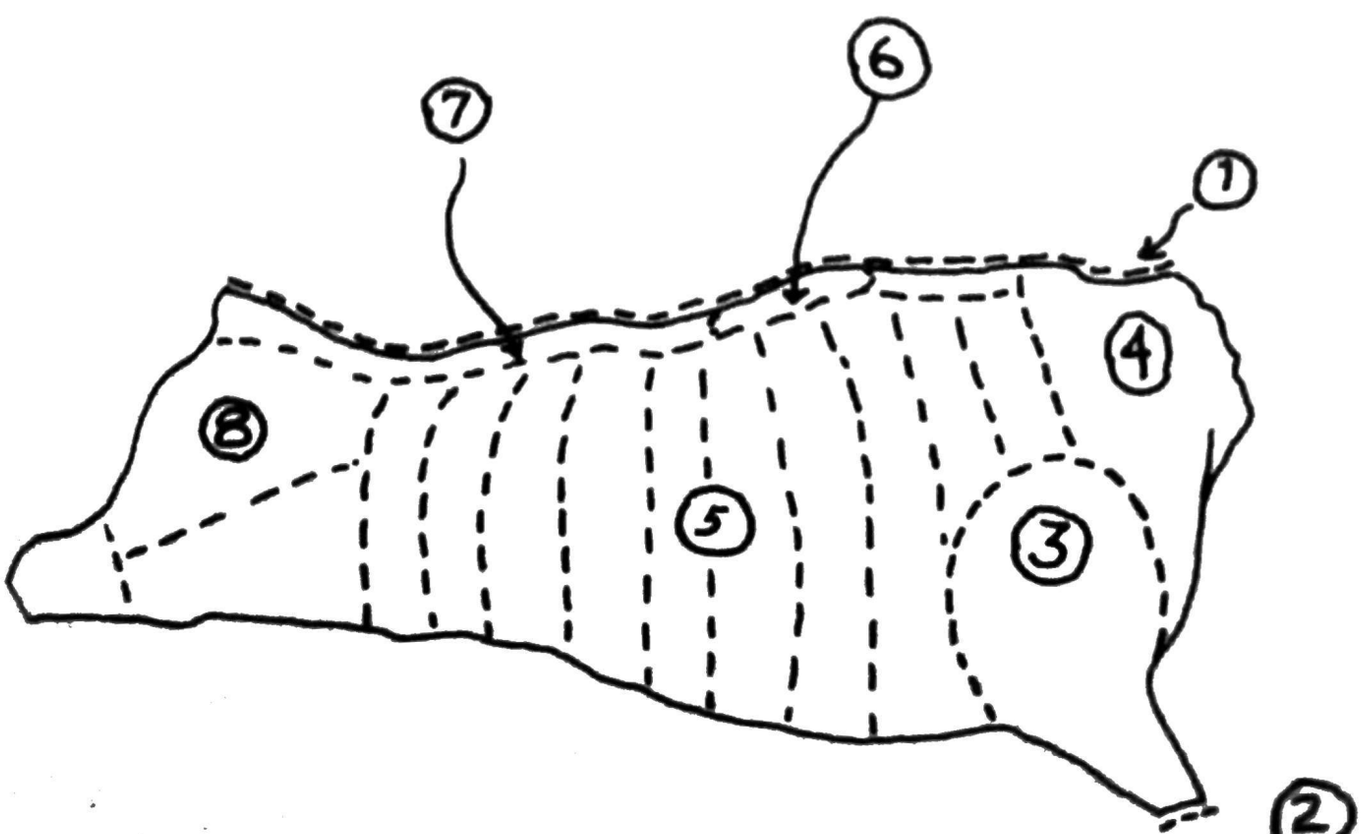
Small game must also be chilled. When we were kids, we used to soak rabbits, chickens, and ducks in a stone tub in the pump house. The temperature was a pleasant consistent 58°F. Then later my mother would fix the small game and birds for dinner or can it. It wasn't till right after WWII that we got a freezer, and Dad *made* that one.

Hogs have traditionally been handled in a slightly different manner than cattle, sheep, or venison. Most pork is cured, that is, soaked in salt brine for a time and then smoked. It doesn't have to be, but usually it is. Most people like bacon far better than fresh side meat,



A. Rump.
B. Mouse Buttock.
C. Leg or Hock.
D. Buttock or Round.
E. Aitch-bone or Top.
F. Surloin.
G. Fore Ribs.
H. Middle Ribs.
I. Chuck Rib.
J. Neck, Clod, or Sticking Piece
K. Shin.
L. Shoulder or Leg of Mutton Piece.
M. Brisket.
N. Thin Flank.
O. Thick Flank.
P. Veiny Piece.

Old Time Meat Cutting Diagram



Benson's Meat Cutting Plan Diagram

for sure. Back when I raised hogs commercially, I dressed out probably scores of them for our own use. Take my word for it: fresh pork gets mighty old after a while.

Curing and smoking pork is much easier and better if the skin is left on the animal. The hair has to be removed from the hog hide first by scalding. When we scalded hogs, we used a fifty-five gallon steel barrel full of water that we heated with an open fire using an old tire for fuel. Four of us stood on benches set around a barrel and dipped the hog down into the boiling water till we could scrape the hair off with a minimum of effort using a piece of 16-gauge tin.

Then we hung the critter in the great, old Chinese elm in the barn lot and scraped the whole thing clean. After that we gutted it, halved it and sawed the animal into pieces just like any other Benson butcher job.

Two-and-a-Half Miles for a Camel

Just about the weirdest critter I ever dressed out was a camel, believe it or not. It happened in Kenya, east of Lake Rudolph. I'd been put in charge of a fifty-seven-man crew comprised of Rendille and Samburu tribesmen. Using only axes, picks, shovels, and a few pry bars, my crew was to blaze a two-and-a-half-mile road through the south pass of Mount Kulau. The new road would lop seventy-five miles off the traveling distance between Thompson Falls north of Nairobi and South Horr on Lake Rudolph.

Now, this part of Africa is particularly remote and inhospitable. I was the first white man some of my native work crew had ever seen, in fact. We faced lions, malaria, leopards, dysentery, black mambas, blood-crazy Shifta raiders, and rampaging gonorrhea.

The men didn't work hard enough, and they soon fell

behind schedule. I tried cajoling and bribing them to work harder, to no avail. More money didn't work; there was nothing to spend it on. I tried withholding penicillin, but the men just got weaker. Towards the end, I went into a sort of mild panic, since I always like to meet my deadlines and do a good job—no matter what the project.

And then I thought of one last gambit to try: meat. After asking around a bit, I located a huge, tough, old camel that must have weighed close to eight hundred pounds. I bought it for fifty bucks and got one of the local police to shoot it in the head. It took nine shots from his trusty old Enfield to do the job!

Even though it was 122 degrees that day, I got right to work and skinned out that old camel. After I finished butchering it, there was hundreds of pounds of meat there. The crew was in heaven. They chewed through an amazing amount of that leathery camel meat and dried the rest the next day. After that, the men labored for close to eleven hours a day until the road was finished, which by the way, was the Wednesday *before* deadline. Africans can certainly be hard workers when properly motivated.

I tell this story to show how important it is to have the confidence to dress out big game or domestic animals, if need be. If I wouldn't have known about do-it-yourself butchering, the road never would have been completed on schedule.

Perhaps you will run into a similar challenge someday—one where butchering know-how will spell the difference between success and failure for you, too.

11. THE FIVE-DOLLAR-A-WEEK DIET

Remember when I said in the first chapter that I would provide a five-dollar-a-week meal plan for you later on? Here is where we will explore this alternative, in all of its awful monotony. Naturally, since we are talking about money, this implies one can also go to the store and purchase the required foodstuffs. Maybe sometime you won't be able to scrounge or glean any of your food, so you'll have to go to the store for it.

The Road to Nepal

During the fall of 1979, five of us worked on a project that included an interesting travel plan across the Annapurna Plains of Nepal into the southeastern area of Tibet over toward Lhasa itself. The political thaw with the Chinese was progressing rapidly, but the trip was fraught with dangers and difficulties.

Katmandu, the capital of Nepal, is about 8,500 feet in elevation, with towering peaks in the distance on three sides. It was well past the first day of September when we arrived, but we found the sun still shining crisply with daytime temperatures in the seventies.

The region we intended to travel, over the Annapurna Plains up toward the Namashi Pass, is consideed a troubled area. The Nepalese require a special trekking permit before anyone can enter that part of the country.

The permits take about three days to acquire if all goes well. We knew that a number of Tibetans came down without them, but the Tibetans knew where the check points were located. We elected to try with the permit first. All else failing, we could always go without if that became necessary. As it worked out, the authorities would only give us a trekking permit that had to be renewed on a thirty-day basis.

One of the items we required, that we did *not* bring along, was food. I knew this was risky since I was aware that it was virtually impossible to buy anything edible in the closed or troubled areas. However, to bring in freeze-dried supplies would have surely raised questions as to where we were headed, what permits we had, and which trekking company we intended to use. Where we were headed was our own business. We didn't want anything except a general permit, and of course we did not want to hire a trekking company to take us in.

As I suspected, the best food available—other than a few packets of wildly expensive freeze-dried stuff—were lentils. The little brown dots of protein and energy were for sale up and down the street and in half the stalls in the market for from ten to twelve rupees a kilo. We each bought twelve kilos or about twenty-five pounds, for the thirty days we assumed we would be on the trail. In addition, we purchased two and a half kilos of powdered milk made in Holland and four kilos of vile tasting Nepalese cheese.

The Lowly Lentil

The important lesson here is that our basic food source for about twenty-five days was the lowly, plain-looking little lentil.

I first learned about lentils from my parents who were raised in northern Europe. Contrary to popular

opinion, the food habit they brought to this country was stewed lentils and not potatoes, as so many believe.

Lentils are a pulse, related to grain, that mature in a pod. Peas and beans are pulse grains as well, but have a slightly lower food value. All of the pulse grains have a higher food value than common feed grains such as corn, wheat, oats, or barley. These are the grains customarily fed to livestock.

Nutrition and Cheap Eating

It is not my intention to get into a protracted discussion on nutrition in this book. Especially when I know first hand that many cheap eaters live entirely on grains that are much lower in food value than the pulses and, by so doing, defy conventional nutritional wisdom.

The Chinese, Koreans, and Vietnamese, for instance, are rice burners. They poop out after a couple of days of heavy exertion and for this reason are considered to be nutritionally inferior by Americans. Probably they are, but how much more inferior considering the great pains we Americans go to so that we can obtain exactly the right balance of proteins, fats, and carbohydrates with the proper mix of vitamins and minerals?

Humans require in the magnitude of fifteen minerals and ten to fourteen vitamins to sustain their lives. All are available in commercial capsules costing no more than six cents each. One capsule per day is sufficient, coming to a grand total of forty-two cents a week. Obviously there isn't very much utility in worrying about eating all kinds of expensive foods just so you get your vitamins and minerals.

After that, there is the necessity for proteins and carbohydrates. Virtually all of the pulses and feed grains have sufficient carbohydrates. If one pound per day won't do it, then up the ration to two pounds. As a gen-

eral rule, an American male performing light-to-medium work requires sixteen calories per pound of body weight. A 200-pounder needs 3,200 calories per day. Females burn in the magnitue of fourteen calories per day per pound. At that rate a 100-pound woman would require about one pound of beans a day. A large fellow should eat perhaps two pounds.

Although humans become very food efficient as they eat less, the above ration is probably not adequate over the long haul. Taking on enough energy may require that the beans be cooked with some molasses, flour, sugar, tomatoes, or other energy producing additive.

Obviously satisfying the energy requirements can usually be accomplished without too much problem. But getting enough of the correct proteins from an extremely cheap grain diet is something else again. Lentils, peas, and beans, in that order, come as close as any commonly available grains or pulses to doing the job of supplying the correct amino acids. Still, they are marginal to low in methionine content, the one limiting protein that all vegetable crops seem to lack.

Corn and wheat come next on the list. Barley and rice contain about 75 percent of what the pulses do with items like potatoes and oats coming in at perhaps 60 percent.

Again, it is doubtful if anything can be found that will do a better job than the pulses. It wasn't for nothing that the U.S. Cavalry was famous for its ability to travel "forty miles a day on beans and hay."

The answer to the protein dilemma is actually quite simple. In order to stay well and healthy, the cheap eater will occasionally have to throw some meat in the pot. No matter if it is begged, scrounged, trapped, bought on the cheap, or whatever, the beans have got to have a bone in with them, at least now and then. If you

keep this in mind, it really isn't difficult. We are only talking about a small portion of meat every three days or so.

Five Dollars a Week—or Less

Given the above parameters, it is interesting to work out a store-bought, cheap eater's diet. This does not include anything the cheap eater might put together from any other sources, but only items purchased in the supermarket.

The prices I quote were common at the time of writing. Bear in mind that the prices of these commodities fluctuate wildly. Some years they are a good buy and others they are much too high for purchasing consideration by the cheap eater.

Here is the list:

Pulse/Grain	Bulk Cost	2 Pounds-Per-Day Cost
Split Peas	$6.10/25 lbs.	49¢
Rice	$9.00/25 lbs.	72¢
Flour	$4.75/25 lbs.	35¢
Potatoes	$6.00/25 lbs.	48¢
Red Beans	$9.70/25 lbs.	60¢
Pinto Beans	$9.40/25 lbs.	75¢
Wheat (whole)	$7.75/50 lbs.	31¢
Lentils	$8.00/25 lbs.	65¢

Using the above figures which do not include corn, barley, or any cheap feed grains except wheat, a cheap eater can get by for anywhere from a low of $2.17 per week for wheat to a high of $5.25 for relatively expensive pinto beans. Even my favorite, lentils, which are very expensive at this time, are only $4.55 per week, and lentils are very nearly a complete food!

If the cheap eater were to pick one of the less expensive grains, not eat a full two pound daily ration (which in actual practice is a very generous portion), and were to spend fifty cents or so a week on vitamins plus a dollar for other scrap, particularly protein, it is obvious that a five-dollar-per-week food budget is realistic. Don't forget as well that we are assuming that no other shortcuts are taken. On this plan you are going to the supermarket for everything from the split peas to the soup bones. If you were able to purchase these same items directly from the farmer, you would save no less than another 40 percent!

Back from Tibet

For those who are interested in hearing the conclusion, our expedition over to the Tibetan border was interesting and fairly successful. After fooling around for several days, we rented two Toyota Corolla taxis to drive us to the town of Pokhra. On our way, we were stopped five times and checked for visas and trekking permits.

Pokhra is about one hundred kilometers from Katmandu and is the end of the line roadwise. It took all day to make it driving ten or so kilometers per hour over paths that were so bad they made African roads look like the Pennsylvania Turnpike. We overnighted in Pokhra at a ratty Nepalese hotel and were well out of the city heading north by first light the next morning.

For the next twenty-five days we saw no game, no crops, and no food for sale. The only thing we were able to buy was one small goat that we sparingly fed into our *dhaal* (lentil) pot over a period of about ten days.

Our little team made it over the lower passes without encountering an insurmountable amount of snow, nor did any of us suffer from altitude sickness. On the

twelfth day, we reached the border after negotiating the Namashi pass and stayed two more days. Because of the constant flow of people through the area in *both* directions and the danger from Chinese patrols, we moved camp both nights.

During the arduous trip back to Katmandu, we had little else to keep us going except for those lentils. When we got there eighteen days later, we were a bit haggard and plenty tired, but still in relatively good health, thanks to those lowly little beans. We got out of the country OK, but were fined 800 rupees because our trekking permit and visas had expired. They could have detained us, but I think they just wanted us to get out of there. We were glad to oblige.

The pulse lesson, I believe, is a valuable one for both cheap eaters and those engaged in survivalist operations. We Americans are a spoiled, overfed people. Good rations like lentils are readily available but they are so simple people generally don't think of them.

12. MY FAVORITE CHEAP EATING RECIPES

People who have not experienced exotic and unusual meats simmering in their stew pots are traditionally very skeptical about using them. The notion of dining on possums and pigeons, cats and rats is initially greeted with alarm, hostility, and revulsion. So, as a help to the uninitiated, I offer these recipes for turning abundant, although uncommon foodstuffs, into tasty sources of protein.

I'll start by providing directions for cooking up some vegetable concoctions from both semiwild and cultivated fixings. Then I'll tell you how to make perfectly good and wholesome meals from wild and semiwild game. From my favorite cheap-eating recipes you will learn what a little imagination and effort can do for minimizing the food bill and pleasing the palate.

Not all the spices I recommend are available to cheap eaters. Yet, don't forget, the trick to eating cheap is substituting something free or easily scrounged for something expensive.

Onions can be interchanged with shallots, cinnamon with nutmeg, and so on. Many exotic spices and herbs can be grown in the home garden or on the kitchen windowsill. Eating cheap doesn't mean eating boring.

With a little ingenuity, you will discover that the meats in many of these recipes are interchangeable just

as the spices and herbs are. They can also be used in place of the chicken or beef in your own favorite casseroles and soups. Experiment for yourself. It won't cost you more than a few cents—if that. You will sensitize yourself to the possibilities of using one kind of critter for another in both everyday and company's-coming dinners. Study other cookbooks with an eye for eating cheap. After all, frog legs taste like chicken drumstricks and dog tastes like rabbit if no one tells you what you're eating. The distaste comes from the mind, not the tongue.

Benefits of Pressure Cooking

There is only one difference in cooking with unconventional meats. They usually have to be cooked longer to be tender. A pressure cooker works wonders in turning game into meat you can cut with a fork. Instead of parboiling the meat for two or three hours, just cook it in a pressure cooker at fifteen pounds of pressure for thirty minutes and then let the pressure drop of its own accord. Or marinate the meat in meat tenderizer or soy sauce in the refrigerator a day or two to tenderize it.

All these recipes have been tried in the Benson kitchen at one time or another and have proven worthy of being passed along to other cheap eaters. All are practical and safe. All provide down-to-earth, nourishing food designed to satisfy the cheap eater's appetite.

Bon Appetit!

Corn Casserole

Soak one cup dried, cracked corn overnight in two cups warm milk. Add salt and a dash of sugar. Put in baking dish, cover, and bake in 300 degree oven for one-and-a-half hours. Add liquid if it dries out. Serve as a vegetable.

Cornmeal Mush

Take one cup white or yellow corn meal, add to one cup cold water, and let set. Bring three cups water to a rapid boil, add salt, then add the mush and cold water. Stir while reducing heat. Cook over low heat for ten to twenty minutes, till it stops getting thicker. Watch that it doesn't make a mess out of your stove.

To eat immediately, serve in bowls with butter, cheese, and sour cream, usually for supper.

To save for the next morning, pour into a greased loaf pan, cover with wax paper, and refrigerate. To fry when set, slice thin and cook slowly in frying pan with hot oil. If you don't cook it fast enough or long enough, it will stick to the pan and you will lose part of it in the turning. If the pan is too hot, it will dry out and burn. One trick is to coat the slices with flour before frying them. Experiment. Serve with butter and maple or elderberry syrup.

Beans

This recipe works for navy beans, pinto beans, or dried limas.

Cooking beans well is a function of three variables—the age of the beans, the place where they were grown, and the softness of the water. The latter is probably the most important. If the water is hard, it can be improved by boiling hard for about half an hour before adding the beans, then pouring the water into a different pot.

To presoak, add the beans to water in a ratio of two parts water to one part beans and let soak overnight. The next day bring them to a slow boil. When they are soft, drain the excess water, and add what you have on hand of the following ingredients, assuming you started with two cups of beans and four cups of water:

1 medium onion, chopped
8 slices salt pork
3 tablespoons dark molasses, brown sugar, or dark syrup
4 tablespoons ketchup
1 tablespoon mustard
salt
curry powder (optional)
Worcestershire sauce (optional)
garlic powder (optional)

Stir, then pour into a greased baking dish, put a few slices of ham, bacon, or salt pork on top, and some ketchup or brown sugar. Bake at 275 degrees for about five hours. Serve with cornbread.

Rice

Bring twice as much water as rice to a hard boil, add salt, then add rice, stir quickly about three times, reduce heat, and cover. Leave on low heat for forty-five minutes to an hour. The water will absorb. Do not stir during the cooking process unless you want pasty rice.

Good with melted butter, green onions, and soy sauce as a meat accompaniment, or good with sugar and cinnamon as a breakfast food or dessert. For use in desserts, try cooking with milk in the ratio of two-and-a-half or three parts milk to one part rice.

Wild Rice

1 cup wild rice
1 cup domestic rice
4 1/2 cups broth
mushrooms
onions
celery

butter
fruit jelly
parsley

Wash wild rice. Mix with domestic rice or use straight, depending on how strong you prefer the taste. Melt butter in a saucepan, add one medium chopped onion and three stalks chopped celery. Saute till translucent. Add mushrooms which have been cut in half.

Add water or broth, just over twice the volume of rice, bring to a rolling boil. Add rice and a couple tablespoons of jelly and parsley. Reduce heat to simmer, cook about forty-five minutes. May also be baked in a 350 degree oven for the same length of time. Watch that it doesn't dry out.

Wheat

Cracked wheat is best, but if you can't get it, whole wheat will do. Presoak overnight, drain. Melt some butter in a heavy pan, and saute one chopped onion. Add the wheat to the butter, coat thoroughly. Do not overstir. Add boiling water in a ratio of one part wheat to two parts water—less if wheat has obviously absorbed a lot of water from the soaking.

Simmer over low heat for one to two hours. Cooking time and consistency of final product will depend on length of soaking time, hardness of water, and whether whole or cracked wheat is used. Add salt and pepper to taste. This takes practice to cook, but the result is nutritious and palatable.

Feel free to experiment with the same cooking method as was used for wild rice once you can handle the proper soaking and cooking time for the wheat. Use as an accompaniment to meat dishes.

For breakfast, forgo the onions, add honey and milk, and the result is a tasty filling cereal.

Pea Soup

split peas
onion
potato
carrots
bay leaf
hambone, bacon, or sausage
salt and pepper

Wash and measure peas, add two-and-a-half times more water. Add onion, sliced from north to south pole, one or two peeled chopped potatoes, sliced carrots, a bay leaf, meat, salt, and pepper. Simmer gently for three to four hours, stirring occasionally to prevent sticking to bottom of pot.

Serve with cornbread and stuffed potatoes.

Lentil Stew

lentils
hambone or salt pork
carrots
potato
onion
bay leaf
salt and pepper

Wash and measure lentils. Add about two-and-a-half times more water for lentil stew, four times more for soup. Add hambone, salt pork, sausage, smoked duck carcass, or whatever, plus onion sliced from north to south pole, carrots, potato, bay leaf, salt, and pepper. Simmer three to four hours, just till lentils are tender but not mushy.

Serve with cornbread.

Greens Salad

dandelion or other greens
bacon
chives
vinegar
eggs
evaporated milk or cream
salt and pepper
sugar
paprika

Wash greens, drain, and place in bowl. Chop the bacon into bits and fry, reserving about half the fat. Mix eggs, cream, vinegar, sugar, and salt, over greens, toss quickly. Add pepper and paprika.

Wilted Dandelion Greens

greens
bacon
vinegar
sugar
salt and pepper
onion, green onion, or chives

Wash greens, drain. Cut bacon into small pieces, brown. Drain off about half the grease. To the remainder add sugar, salt, pepper, and vinegar. Pour over the greens, return all to the skillet, and cook just till wilted. Don't overcook. Serve immediately.

Dandelion Greens

dandelion greens
salt pork
potatoes

Wash greens several times in warm water with salt to remove sand and kill bugs. Cube a small amount of salt pork, add to greens, and simmer one to two hours. Add one potato for each cup of greens, simmer another half hour, and serve.

Puffballs

Pick these mushrooms young and tender, before they have split open. They may be stored in the refrigerator only a few days before use.

Slice puffballs, fry in butter on both sides, serve on a heated platter. May be served with cream or evaporated milk which has been poured into pan juices, heated thoroughly, and poured over puffball slices. Add some sherry for zest.

Morels

Morels, also called sponge mushrooms, may be found in May in moist grassy places near old settlements. Morels will be found where they weren't yesterday. They must be prepared within two to three days of picking.

Wash, cut in half, and soak morels in salt water. Drain, pat dry. Heat butter, lightly flour morels, and brown in butter. They should reduce to about half their original size.

Another method is to make a batter from flour, milk, egg, and salt. Dip the morels in this batter, fry in deep oil, and drain. Due to the degree of shrinkage, the morels have a tendency to break apart and the coating to come off, so handle with care.

Fiddleheads

Sometimes called a cinnamon fern, these grow in moist shady places and can be harvested in May or early

June. After that they become bitter. Only while they are young is their taste mellow.

Wash freshly picked fiddleheads, add to small amount of boiling salted water, and boil till tender. Fiddleheads may also be steamed. Drain, add salt and butter, and serve.

Boiled Camas

Wash freshly dug or dried camas to remove dirt and dried outer layers. Place in salted water, boil, add butter. Use about one cup per person, serve with meat similar to potatoes. Camas has the texture of an onion, but tastes similar to potato.

Cattail Casserole

1 pound fresh spring cattails
3 cups cheddar or jack cheese
1 1/2 cups cooked, diced potatoes
salt, pepper to taste
butter
paprika
milk, cream, or evaporated milk

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Carefully prepare cattails by washing in cool spring water, trim off green tops, and clip off tough outer layer on the lower part. Steam ivory-colored pieces until tender. Remove cattails from steamer, dry on towel, salt lightly, and set aside.

Mix cheese, cream, potatoes, salt, and pepper. Pat the cattails dry once more, then gently add to the cheese mixture. Reserve one-third cheese. Butter a 9-by-13-inch casserole, gently fill with mixture, sprinkle remaining cheese over top, and garnish with paprika. Bake one-half hour or until cheese is light golden brown, but do not burn.

Serve as a main supper dish with bread and soup, or

as a vegetable with other meat and rice. Serves two to four.

Acorn Flour

Snap the caps off one pound of acorns. Lay out on a maple or other hardwood board, roll with a rolling pin to crack the shells so you can remove the meats. Soak overnight covered with water. Throw out water, add new water, bring to a boil, and boil for two hours. Discard water, soak again, and taste the water. It should not be bitter. If it is, repeat the process.

After the last soaking, lay out the acorns to dry. When dry, grind into a paste. The paste may then be cooked like cornmeal mush, using a ratio of one part acorns to one part water. Or spread the paste out thin and let it dry like flour. It will be coarse like breadcrumbs, but makes tasty and nutritious cakes and cookies.

Along Came a Blackbird

6 to 8 blackbirds
purple grapes
lemon juice
salt
butter

Clean birds, rinse, and pat dry. Lightly salt and sugar cavities. Stuff with purple grapes, skewer or sew shut. Baste with butter and lemon juice, salt. Skewer on rotisserie or place on rack above coals. Broil approximately one-half hour, not too close to heat and being careful meat does not dry out. Baste often.

Serves four people.

Cat Cacciatore

1 cat
1 pound tomatoes
1 cup tomato paste
1 teaspoon crushed dried saffron
1/2 teaspoon celery seed
2 bay leaves
meat tenderizer
lard
2 onions
1 clove garlic
flour
2 tablespoons sugar
red wine
1 teaspoon salt
pepper

Skin, clean, and cut up one cat, domestic preferred. Brown in small amount of lard. Remove from heat, saute two chopped onions and the garlic in same fat.

Combine tomatoes, tomato paste, salt, pepper, saffron, celery seed, bay leaves, sugar and red wine, add to sauteed onions. Replace cat, simmer two to three hours.

Serves four.

Oven-Baked Barbecued Rat

4 medium rats
1 1/2 cups barbecue sauce
3/4 cup bread crumbs
1 onion sliced in rings
butter or lard
meat tenderizer
broth (any kind)

Preheat oven to 300 degrees. Brown whole rats in oil, pour off remaining oil. Arrange rats in roasting pan so they just touch, and coat with barbecue sauce. Cover tightly, cook about three hours till tender. You will know when they are tender if the leg pulls away from the body. Check the rats periodically and add broth if

they dry out on top or if the sauce looks too thick or starts to scorch.

About one-half hour before the rats are to be done, fry the onion gently in butter till translucent and remove. Brown the bread crumbs in remaining butter. Sprinkle bread crumbs over barbecue sauce, arrange onion slices on top, and return to oven for about twenty minutes.

Serve with rice, noodles, or wheat. Serves two people.

Pooch Stew

1 pound dog meat
1 large eggplant (zucchini may be substituted)
1 green pepper
1/2 pound mushrooms
1 medium onion
2 12-ounce cans tomato sauce
1/2 cup cooking oil or bear lard
1 to 1 1/2 tablespoons meat tenderizer
1 clove garlic
salt and pepper
1 fresh lemon

Bone and cut meat, removing any tendon or gristle. Sprinkle with tenderizer and let stand several hours. Brown in oil or lard, add finely chopped garlic, cover with tomato sauce and simmer several hours.

About one hour before you think the meat will be done, chop onions and peppers, brown in some more lard till onions are translucent and add to meat mixture. Add mushrooms which have been cut in half. Brown the eggplant (zucchini) which has been cut into one-inch cubes. Garnish with sliced lemon. Simmer gently till eggplant pierces easily with a fork. Do not overcook—you don't want the eggplant to turn to mush. A little red

wine in the sauce makes a nice addition if you have some.

Serve with boiled potatoes, boiled white, brown, or wild rice, noodles, or boiled wheat. Serves four people.

Pickled Sparrow

6 large sparrows
1 large onion, diced
1/4 cup peppercorns
2 cups vinegar
1 cup water
salt and pepper
1/2 cup oil

Pressure cook sparrows till just tender. This will take some experimenting because the birds may vary in ages and degrees of tenderness. Remove, wash, pat dry, and cool. Arrange in glass, plastic, or stainless steel container, or earthenware crock, and cover with onion, peppercorns, vinegar, oil, water, salt, and pepper. Marinate for three days. Some folks like to add a tablespoon or two of sugar to the marinade—suit yourself.

These are very good with rye crackers and cheese and make a good picnic entree. Serves four to six people depending on size of sparrows and what else you're serving at the time.

Beer-boiled Carp

1 medium carp, filleted and cut in pieces
salt
1-2 cans beer to cover
2 medium onions, sliced thin
3 tablespoons peppercorns
1 bay leaf
1 lemon, sliced thin

1 tablespoon sugar
flour
butter or bear lard
1 whole lemon or bottled lemon juice

Sprinkle the fish with lemon juice and salt, let stand about twenty minutes. Drain, pat dry. Alternate sliced onion and fish pieces in a deep kettle, add bay leaf, peppercorns, and lemon slices, and cover entire mixture with beer. Simmer till tender, about thirty to forty-five minutes depending on the size and age of the fish. The fish should separate nicely with a fork. If it doesn't separate, it's not done; if it flakes or falls apart, it's overdone. Remove fish, keep warm.

Melt butter, add flour, sugar, and a little broth. Begin mixing, then add to the pot and stir gently to disperse the flour throughout the broth. It should be very thin. Pour over fish and serve over rice or as a side dish accompanying beans or lentils.

Serves four to six people.

Baked Carp with Veggies

1 small carp or half a medium carp, filleted
1/3 cup diced celery
1 green pepper, cut in rings
1 carrot, sliced thin
1 potato, sliced thin
1 onion, sliced thin
1 large can stewed tomatoes or use fresh in season
flour
paprika
parsley
lard
seasoned salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Sprinkle carp with flour

and seasoned salt. Brown gently in lard, using a deep heavy pot. Remove fish. Sliver vegetables, pat dry the carrots and potatoes, roll in pan drippings to coat. Arrange in bottom of pan, pour on stewed tomatoes, arrange fish on top, and garnish with the sliced onions, sliced green peppers, and paprika.

Bake in oven thirty to forty-five minutes till fish flakes apart and vegetables are done. Baste during cooking to avoid drying out the fish or the vegetables. Permit the top to brown during the last ten minutes of cooking.

Remove from oven, garnish with parsley, serve in warm bowls with fresh baked bread. Serves four.

Down-Home Possum and Sweet Potatoes

1 possum, skinned, cleaned, and cut like a chicken
sweet potatoes
salt pork
1 bay leaf
sage
salt, pepper, paprika
garlic powder or 1 clove garlic

Preheat oven to 300 degrees. Parboil the sweet potatoes twenty minutes, cool, and remove skins.

Arrange the cut-up possom in a heavy roasting pan, add the spices, and cover with the salt pork. Roast for one to one-and-a-half hours, till the meat breaks apart easily with a fork. Keep covered initially so the meat does not dry out.

Remove from the oven, add the sweet potatoes, turning them to coat with pan grease. Continue cooking about one more hour. Leave top off towards end of cooking, but do not allow to dry out.

Possum, like coon, has layers of fat interspersed with

the muscle fibers. The trick in cooking these meats is to melt out the fat without drying out the meat. It takes practice, especially with very old or very fat animals. I've found that parboiling the meat or pressure cooking it first helps in some cases, but not always.

Serves four people. This is tasty served with cornbread.

Baked Coon

1 raccon, skinned, cleaned, and cut like a chicken
2 onions cut in halves lengthwise
sweet potatoes or carrots
celery stalks and leaves
3 apples
1 bay leaf
salt
peppercorns
chicken or other stock

Preheat oven to 300 degrees. Parboil the raccoon in broth with onions, carrots, and celery cut in large pieces. Add the bay leaf, salt, and peppercorns. Simmer the coon or pressure cook it until it is tender and all fat is removed from between the muscle layers. This could take quite a while on an old coon. When tender, remove, cut away all exterior fat and as much of the intermuscular fat as you can. Save the stock and the larger vegetables such as the carrots or sweet potatoes.

Arrange the cooked raccoon in a heavy roasting pan, add some more onions if you have them (sliced in chunks from north pole to south), carrots or sweet potatoes, and chunks of cored apples. Leave the skins on these for interest, unless they are very tough or scaly.

Put pan in oven. Baste meat and vegetables with pan juices to keep them from drying out, and continue baking till lightly browned. Carefully sprinkle some

brown sugar on the apples and sweet potatoes toward the end of the cooking time.

Serves four. Serve with corn bread.

Brunswick Stew

2 squirrels
bacon fat or bear lard
2 onions, sliced thin
3 cups broth, any kind
flour mixed with seasoning salt
2/3 cup sherry (optional)
2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
3 tomatoes or 1 can stewed tomatoes
1 cup lima beans or pinto beans
1 cup cut corn
1 cup green beans
1/3 cup okra (optional)
butter
bread crumbs
parsley

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Skin, clean, and cut-up the squirrels like you would a chicken. Put flour and seasoning salt in a paper sack, shake with squirrel pieces to coat. Melt bacon fat or lard, brown squirrels. Remove the squirrel pieces to a casserole. In the same oil, gently fry the sliced onions and put on top of squirrel. To the remaining fat, add the broth, Worcestershire, sherry, and parsley (chervil may be substituted if available). Pour this mixture over the squirrel, place in oven, and bake thirty minutes.

In the same pan, melt some butter and brown about half-cup of bread crumbs. Put over squirrel about twenty minutes before end of cooking time.

Serves four people.

Squirrel and Wild Rice

2 squirrels
flour mixed with seasoning salt
butter
1/2 cup wild rice
1/2 pound mushrooms
1/4 cup white rice
1 medium onion
3 stalks celery
3 tart apples, cored and diced

Skin, clean, and cut-up squirrel like you would a chicken. Wash and pat dry. Place seasoned flour in a paper sack, shake squirrel pieces till coated.

In a saucepan melt the butter or bear lard, and fry the squirrel on both sides to brown. Remove to a casserole. In the same oil, fry the chopped onions and celery till translucent, add the mushrooms and rice and cook till evenly coated. Place over squirrel, add broth, and oven bake about one hour. The meat should be tender when done.

Serves four.

Perfect Pigeon

6 pigeons
1 medium onion
day old cornbread
2 stalks celery
marjoram
thyme
salt and pepper
butter or bear lard

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Clean pigeons, gently separate skin from breast leaving attached to form a pocket. Make a stuffing by sauteing the chopped onion

and celery in butter until just translucent. Add corn bread which has been crumbled, season with marjoram and thyme if available, as well as salt and pepper. Place stuffing inside cavity and between skin and breast.

Place breast side up in a closed frying pan, pour on melted butter, salt and pepper, and roast in 350 degree oven for one hour. Watch during end of cooking not to dry out.

Serves four.

French-Fried Muskrat

1 muskrat
1 egg
1/2 cup flour
salt
bear lard
parsley
bay leaf

Skin, clean, and cut-up the muskrat like a chicken. Parboil in water or broth to which salt and a few peppercorns and a bay leaf has been added. Remove the muskrat from the broth, pat dry. Prepare a batter from the egg, flour, and salt, and dip each piece of meat in and then into the hot oil. Arrange on a platter, serve with rice or wild rice.

Serves two.

Gourmet Muskrat

2 muskrats
6 eggs
butter
1 teaspoon mustard
1 tablespoon flour
3/4 cup cream or evaporated milk

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Clean, skin, and cut-up the muskrats like you would a chicken. Put the eggs on to hard boil.

Boil the muskrat in slightly salted water for about an hour or until the meat is tender. Test it with a fork, it should flake but not fall off the bone. Remove from water and place in baking dish.

After the eggs are hard-boiled, separate the whites and yolks. Mash yolks with two tablespoons of butter per egg, add mustard, flour, and cream or evaporated milk.

Mix gently over low heat till thickened, pour over muskrats, bake twenty minutes, and serve with rice, wild rice, or noodles.

Serves two to four.

CONCLUSION

I hope, having read this far, you are convinced that people who really want to work at it can eat well for pennies a day.

For you it may be a matter of degrees. Perhaps the hard work of putting up food, the constant attention to detail necessary to develop sources, the loss of pride, and the monotony may preclude you from developing a full-blown cheap eater's plan. But just using some of the information can help tremendously.

As an example here, a young logger who lives with his family not too far from us recently lost his job. Instead of sitting on his duff watching TV, he started raising a garden, scrounging from farmers and producers, and collecting wild and semiwild edibles.

As a result, he cut his food bill back to slightly more than fifteen dollars per week.

Being something of a recreational eater, he did not go on a diet of solid peas, lentils, and jack rabbits. Nor, on the other end of the scale, could he quite handle a program that included dogs, cats, and grackles.

Yet this same fellow readily admits that if it really becomes necessary, he will be ready. "I lived in Alaska in 1970 and '71," he says. "The second winter it got so rough we couldn't get out on the trapline for weeks at a time or even check the gill net. Grub got awful short.

We ate a bobcat and then one of the sled dogs. As far as eating dog goes," he says, "it's better than some other alternatives we faced." I caught his drift and think you will too . . .

Almost every person faces some periods of adversity in their lives. It is my sincere hope that these ideas will help you over the rough spots. As I have pointed out, you can even do it with a bit of class, if you like.

Good luck and good eating!

Publisher's Note: Ragnar Benson welcomes correspondence from his readers. If you have an old-time technique you'd like to share, or any questions or suggestions, drop a line to Ragnar Benson, c/o Paladin Press Editorial Dept., P.O. Box 1307, Boulder, Colorado 80306. Your cards and letters will be greatly appreciated.